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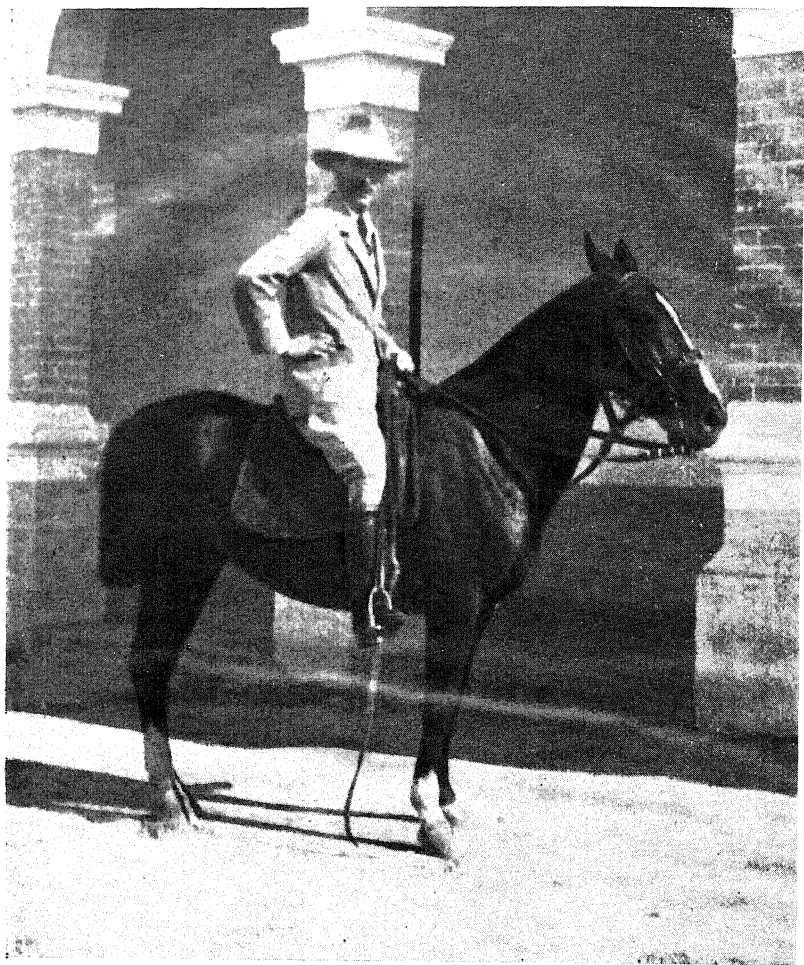
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H O O H O O E Y



“PICKLES” : AUTHOR UP.

HOO HOOEY

AN ARGENTINE ARCADY, AND HOW
I CAME THERE

BY
H. J. MUIR

Illustrated by Photographs
and
Sketches by STANLEY LLOYD

*Something hidden, go and find it. Go and look behind
the Ranges—*

*Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting
for you. Go!*

Rudyard Kipling

LONDON : COUNTRY LIFE, LIMITED
2-10 TAVISTOCK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.2

First Published, 1947

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
WYMAN & SONS LIMITED, LONDON, READING AND FAKENHAM

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INTRODUCTION

AS a rule the men whose fate or fortune it is to live and work in the less well known parts of the world, have neither time nor inclination to write of their experiences and impressions as they occur. Only in the enforced idleness of old age do they sometimes write their reminiscences; and memory is not always reliable.

Shortly before the war a relative gave me a great bundle of letters, with the suggestion that I should read them again, edit them, and make them into a book. They were letters I had written while working very hard in Northern Argentina, a part of the world which, though eminently habitable, is thinly populated, and very little known.

I have not yet reached my anecdotage, but, the war having put an end to my other activities, I adopted my relative's suggestion about the letters. I have been unable to reproduce them exactly, as, for the most part, they were carelessly and hurriedly written in the intervals of toil, but they permit me to recount the impressions created at the time by incidents and experiences of no ordinary kind.

Friends who still live in the parts these pages describe tell me that, except close to the new roads and railways, life there has hardly changed since I was there. Only an occasional aeroplane flies high above those hills and forests to challenge the sovereignty of the skies with the soaring condors. Only on the few main roads and the larger plantations has horse-power replaced horses (and mules and bullocks) and the spanner replaced the spurs. Everywhere else, amidst those vast ranges and valleys, men live and work as they have done for centuries and, as I hope, they will live and work for centuries to come.

Those who look at a map of Argentina will see in the north-west corner a province called Jujuy. It was there that I found my Arcady. The local pronunciation of Jujuy is Hoo Hooey, hence the title of this book.

Barton-on-Sea,
1946

H. J. MUIR

PART ONE

OFF TO A NEW WORLD

No. 1

S.S. "Westland"

ONCE more I have said good-bye to London for ever. This time I am so certain of it that, before entering the station, I kicked my hard hat over the cab-rank to prove that I shall never wear such a thing again.

Now I am sitting on the deck of an emigrant ship bound for Buenos Aires. We sail in about two hours' time.

As I write I am watching the extraordinary crowd of my fellow emigrants file slowly aboard, and am wondering how soon I shall have sunk to the same desperate state of poverty and dejection which obviously afflicts them.

Yes, I can hear you say that I deserve nothing more for having again abandoned the steady path of industry after all your persuasion. But it was hopeless. I just couldn't endure that frightful city a day longer. For six months I have fought against the longing to run away once more, but have failed, and now I am going so far away that I hope I shall never be able to return until I have made a fortune or proved myself to be as incapable of doing so as you no doubt think.

But I am still young enough to redeem my failures, and, though three continents and a dozen trades have all weighed me and found me wanting, as I have weighed them with like result, I feel that I have gained a vast amount of experience in my twenty-three years and that some day, somewhere, I shall use it to advantage ; but never within the crowding walls of a great city.

Yesterday morning as I hurried, late as usual, out of the underground station with the myriads of pale-faced, fretful city workers jostling beside me, I suddenly caught sight of a poster which brought me to an abrupt halt. It depicted a wide plain bathed in brilliant sunshine, with a blue range of mountains behind and in the foreground a horseman lounging in his saddle as he watched a herd of cattle grazing in knee-high pasture.

"Come to Argentina," said the placard in huge letters. "Assisted passages. Jobs waiting for everyone."

I stood gazing at the hard work that cowboy was doing, and compared it with the work that was waiting for me at the office. I lingered so long that presently I realised that I could never again face the rat-eyed little manager, to see him peering at me over his spectacles and reproving me for being late again.

I quickly noted the name of the shipping agents on the placard, and in ten minutes I was in their office, where I found that, for only five pounds, I could obtain a passage to Buenos Aires and that there was a ship sailing immediately.

I dashed back to my lodgings and packed my small possessions, collected all my money, returned to the agents and bought my passage, and four hours later was crossing the Channel to join this ship.

She is Dutch: carries cargo on the homeward voyage, then the holds are whitewashed and an iron scaffolding affair erected from floor to ceiling on which are placed the crudest of mattresses and pillows, made of sacking stuffed with straw, and she becomes a passenger ship.

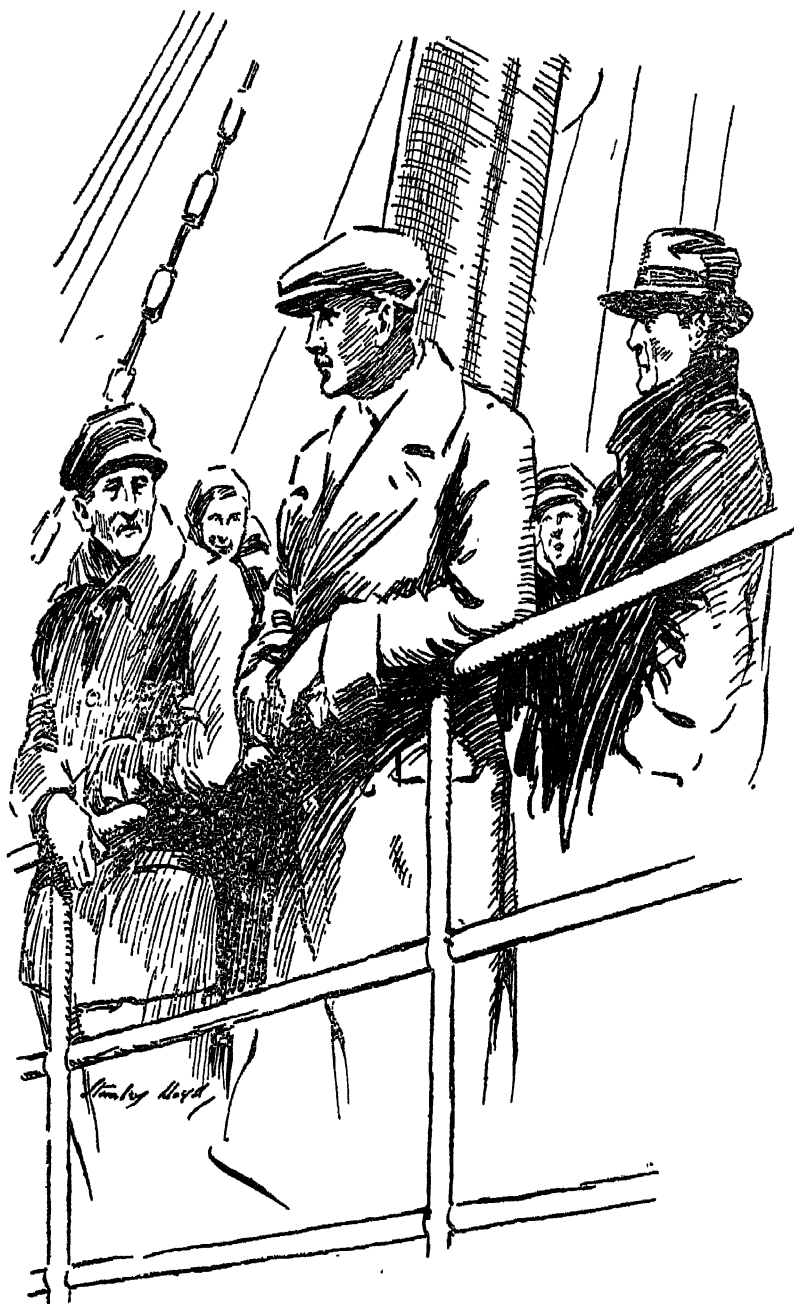
And, my God, what passengers! The scourings of all the lowest quarters of every city of Europe by the look of them, and the destitute and outcast from the remotest, poverty-stricken areas. Greeks, Syrians, Russians, Poles, Turks, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Jews; all, or nearly all, cringing and afraid as though escaping from scenes of torture, as perhaps they are.

Fortunately there is a sprinkling of people like myself, one or two of them English. What are we? Adventurers? Wasters? Anyhow, we are alike inasmuch as we have decent clothes amidst the rags of the emigrants, and are well washed at the moment, though, as far as I can see, we shall soon be as dirty as the others, for there are no washing arrangements in evidence.

We sail this afternoon at four o'clock and our first port of call is Rio, so you will not hear from me for several weeks.

Don't think too badly of me, and know that I am happy to be away from that grim grey prison which is called the City.

I am full of hope of life once more, and only impatient to



TO KNOW THAT SHE IS HEADING FOR A NEW LAND

feel the bows of this ship lift to the Atlantic swell and to know that she is heading for a new land, where a man can breathe and live and be free, instead of being an insignificant microbe in that horrible London.

ROLLING DOWN TO RIO

No. 2

At Sea. In the Atlantic. Near the Equator

I SUPPOSE I shall survive this voyage; but at times I doubt it.

Of all the smelly, dirty, sordid experiences possible, I should say that a voyage in an emigrant ship is the worst.

The officers and crew are decent Dutchmen, but they are very strict with their cargo of human cattle. They will not allow us to sleep on deck, and you can imagine what the air is like in the holds, with scarcely any ventilation : about two hundred people in each hold; most of them without the least desire ever to come on deck.

Incredible that human beings should be so degraded that they have no wish to gaze at the beauty of a tropic night at sea, to feel the sting of salt spray in their faces, and breathe deep the winds that tear across a thousand miles of ocean.

To-day we are in an oily calm for the first time. We ran out of the trade winds yesterday, and are consequently nearly roasting. There are no awnings, and the few inches of shade which deck-houses afford can protect barely a dozen people. The steel decks are unbelievably hot to sit on and the hatch covers, where we have sprawled hitherto, have now been removed to admit a little, very necessary, air into the teeming holds. Alas, they also admit the tropic sun, thereby arousing the impotent anger of the crowd below, who seem to prefer to suffocate in their own stench than to be roasted. Most of them refuse to come on deck and breathe fresh air.

I managed to make friends with one of the cook's mates a few days ago, by offering to help him scrub potatoes; they -re never peeled. The result is that I am admitted to the

fo'c'sle deck, which is reserved for the crew, and that, occasionally, I get a helping of the crew's food, which is infinitely better than that supplied to the emigrants.

The feeding arrangements for the latter are horrible. There is no such thing as a dining saloon or even tables. Three times a day a bell is rung, and representatives of each family, or party, line up outside the galley to collect their ration of food. Battered tin bowls and tin mugs are provided, which we must wash ourselves, in hot sea water which smells of oil. For breakfast we have a helping of glutinous grey stuff, which is supposed to be porridge but tastes like coffee and onions, and a mug of coffee tasting like onions and porridge; for lunch a bowl of a sort of stew with unpeeled potatoes and great chunks of fat meat floating in it.

With each meal we get a small loaf of dirty coloured bread. For tea there is a lump of margarine and a liberal helping of quite excellent marmalade. For the first few days I ate nothing but that and bread; exchanged my other rations with those who don't like marmalade; fortunately there are many.

Strange how sea air and environment can overcome one's fastidiousness. After three or four days I was so hungry that I ate the horrible porridge and the revolting stew with real satisfaction, not with any pleasure, but with a feeling that I was fulfilling an urgent need. So far there have been no ill effects, and, with the help of the few extras I get from the crew, I am now doing very well as regards nourishment.

It is the stink down below at night which is my worst trouble. I don't know that I have slept more than two hours on any night since I came aboard. It is all too beastly to tell you more about.

I am praying that to-night the hatch covers will be left off, if so I may be able to get enough air to sleep properly.

I will write more to-morrow and tell you.

.

Hurrah! I'm feeling marvellous. The hatches were left off all night, but I did better still. I had a chat with a sort of bos'n person who is very anxious to learn English. He knows enough to understand me now, so I made a bargain that if he would let me sleep on the fo'c'sle deck I would give him English lessons whenever he liked.

He promptly agreed, and produced a new-looking mattress and a decent pillow, and actually fixed up a little awning for me. I can now wash at the crew's taps, where there are decent tin basins and quite respectable water, instead of the mean allowance of a sort of oily bilge water which is all the passengers get.

We are near the equator now; the sea dead asleep and almost solid-looking, so that the flight of flying fish is more than usually amazing.

A small whale rose a mile or so away this morning, and one almost expected to see it climb right out and slither across the glassy surface.

The sun is terrifically powerful, yet its light is strange. There must be an almost invisible haze in the air, for sea and sky are not blue, but of a uniform pearl colour. There are no gleaming reflections of sunlight on the water and, while we can see for miles, there is no visible horizon; just a merging of sea and sky that is quite undefined: all rather mysterious and uncanny. One feels that the ship cannot really be moving through such solid-looking water, yet a glance at the wake, spreading out fan-wise astern, though oily and tired-looking, proves that we are moving just as fast as usual.

I thought of what it would be like to be adrift in a small boat in such conditions; the sun's fierce heat magnified by the haze; everything apparently eternally dead from horizon to horizon, except the flying fish and the whale, whose unexpected emergence from the mysterious depths below accentuates one's remoteness and adds to the sense of loneliness and helplessness.

Better to be shipwrecked in the mad turmoil of a storm, when one can at least combat the elements and die fighting.

It is the peculiar silence in the air all about us to-day which is so sinister. The heavy air seems to shut us in, as though in a glass case. Everyone is speaking in a hushed voice for no apparent reason. The thudding of the engines and occasional odd noises from down in the bowels of the ship are strangely accentuated.

Phew! As I write I am getting quite strung up about it. Sort of nervous tension. Why doesn't someone shout or sing or laugh and break the spell?

Hullo, what's happening? The crew have just appeared in full strength and are replacing the hatch covers. There can be only one explanation of that. A storm is brewing. Pity I said that about being shipwrecked in a storm. I take it back.

Must go and have a word with my bos'n friend.

.

Three days later. The storm was a false alarm, though unpleasant enough for a few hours. I hear from the bos'n that the barometer fell suddenly and abnormally for the time of year, so the captain decided to batten down and prepare for anything. A big swell got up and made the ship plunge and roll badly, being lightly ballasted with her human cargo only. I was thankful not to be down in the suffocating hold, where I am sure a great number of people were sea-sick.

Every moment we expected the onslaught of a gale, but none came. The sky and sea got more and more greasy-looking and opaque towards sunset. The sun glowed like a dull burning coal, then gradually faded until it looked like the moon, and disappeared long before it reached where the horizon should have been.

The air became more and more sultry and oppressive, leaving everyone on edge with anticipation, but nothing happened.

Before dawn the sky cleared. Stars came out in their glittering millions, the swell gradually subsided and we ran into perfect tropic weather, blazingly hot and blindingly brilliant.

The bos'n says that there must have been a big storm not far away and that we ran into its aftermath.

I'm a little disappointed. I like a storm, within limits.

Two days more and we reach Rio de Janeiro.

I'm longing, more than I can say, to reach land again and to fling away the clothes I've worn on this unpleasant voyage, soak in a hot bath for an hour or more, dress in fresh, clean garments and sit down at a real table, with real white linen, and eat a real meal of decent food.

To-morrow we should sight land!

At dawn this morning the ship stopped suddenly. I was sleeping under my awning when the abrupt ceasing of vibration from the engines woke me.

I got up and looked around, to see if we were close to land, or perhaps another ship.

Nothing in sight but the calm ocean, with the blackness of night still in its depths, though the sun was nearly up and the Eastern sky a blaze of light.

Then I heard voices on the well-deck and saw a queer sight.

A cluster of ragged emigrants, pale beyond words from their two weeks in the hold; and amidst them, on a level with their heads, was a bundle of the most sinister shape, resting on a plank held by four sailors.

The Captain spoke hurried words from a book he held, then raised his hand. The sailors tipped up the plank. The bundle slid off into the sea and disappeared. The engines started; they had stopped for barely a minute.

The group of emigrants gasped and clutched each other. One or two sobbed as they moved to the bulwarks to look over at the sea which slid so silently past.

I hear it was an old Russian woman.

A sad end to her hopes of a new land. God knows amongst what monstrous, miles-deep mysteries she now lies, with only a few bubbles by way of epitaph.

.

Entering Rio Harbour. An awe-inspiring sight. Great forest-clad mountains of fantastic shape on either hand, with deep valleys running away into the interior. The harbour is dotted with little islands, many of them crowned with a white villa and with lawns to the shore. Now the town is in sight, gleaming white and gold in the sunlight, with spires and domes and pinnacles clustering along the shore against the background of mountain and jungle.

It all looks very opulent yet somehow unreal, as though human beings have established a precarious foothold at the water's edge and have built their palaces and gilded them and defied the vast primeval hills and forests to eject them.

The city is the merest fringe at the feet of the ranges. One feels that at any moment one of those sleeping giants might roll over and spill all the cluster of white and gold houses into the sea.

I don't think we are to be allowed ashore here. I'm not

sorry. It looks too expensive. There goes the anchor, so that we shan't be going alongside a wharf.

Must hurry off to get this letter posted in the purser's office.

Am very well, and now all excitement to be actually in South American waters.

I LAND IN SOUTH AMERICA AND GO TO PRISON

No. 3

S.S. "*Westland*." Leaving Santos, Brazil

I HAVE just made an exciting escape from prison! I had gone ashore at Santos, a shabby seaport up a muddy estuary, with five other fellows: two Englishmen of the clerk type, also a Dutch mechanic, a Norwegian valet who looks like a viking, and a little German who has been a jockey, all of whom speak English.

The ship lay alongside a wharf. As it was Sunday, and incredibly hot, there was little activity on shore. A few sleepy-looking port officials, mostly of Negro type, lounged aboard. A few high-wheeled mule wagons, with half-drunk drivers, rattled across the cobble-stones of the wharf to receive the oddments of cargo or emigrants' chattels which we were to unload.

Those of the passengers who wished were permitted to go ashore until four-thirty: the sort of occasion when birds of a feather join up, so that we six, who spoke English, at once formed ourselves into a party.

Everything in the town was shut except the churches, to which all the women were hurrying, dressed in funereal black-stuff from head to foot, with strips of black cloth over their heads instead of hats. Everywhere cracked bells tolled from shabby, whitewashed churches.

The few men we saw were all apparently sleeping off their Saturday night debauch as they lay anywhere where there was a bit of shade. The populace is of every colour, from fawn to black.

We spent half an hour or so exploring the streets and looking at shuttered shops, then found ourselves in the outskirts of the town, with a cactus-grown desert ahead of us and the gleam of the sea beyond.

We had hoped to find some place where we might get a bath and a decent meal, but had seen nothing resembling a respectable hotel. The places which might have been hotels looked more like bawdy houses after a heavy night's business, with everyone asleep except myriads of flies.

A blowzy black or yellow female here and there leered at us from half-opened doors with an expression which was intended to be inviting but was quite the contrary.

The vision of the sea a mile or two beyond the town filled us with hopes of a swim. Sweating violently, we set out to trudge through the deep sandy dust. Innumerable lizards and snakes crossed our path amongst the grotesque shapes of the cactus plants, which were the only sign of vegetation, except a few tufts of yellow grass.

No sign of human habitation was in sight when we eventually slid down a sand dune on to a mile-wide beach. The sea was calm, with only a slight froth where its margin lapped the shore. We might have been the first men in the world to visit that desert strand.

Flinging off our clothes, we ran naked towards the water. A shock awaited us. The sea was almost unpleasantly hot as our feet became submerged. We paddled on for two or three hundred yards and still the opaque, mud-coloured water barely reached our ankles. We walked nearly half a mile out to sea before it was deep enough to cover our bodies when we lay and wallowed in the hot, soup-like moisture. There was no cooling refreshment in the experience. The best we could hope for was to soak off some of the accumulated dirt of the last few weeks and acquire a coating of a new kind of dirt which the muddy water would leave.

After about half an hour one of the party happened to look shorewards. He gave an excited exclamation and pointed. Following his gesture we saw that our little piles of clothing were surrounded by a troop of about twenty horsemen, whose accoutrements glinted in the sunlight.



WE WERE PERMITTED TO PUT ON ONLY OUR TROUSERS
AND WERE THEN MARCHED OFF

Some had dismounted and were obviously examining our garments, wherein, we realized anxiously, were our meagre supplies of money.

Hurriedly we waded ashore and ran, all embarrassed in our nakedness, towards this strange invasion by soldiery of some sort.

A queer lot they were: dressed in soiled and torn linen uniforms, with tarnished and dented brass helmets and cuirasses. Each man had a large revolver and a rusty sabre.

They were mounted on mangy, half-starved ponies and mules and wore huge rusty spurs on the heels of their canvas shoes.

Their leader had drawn his sabre and rode to meet us, waving the weapon menacingly as he shouted excitedly. He was perhaps dirtier than his men and had certainly shaved less recently and his hair was longer, but one imagined he was an officer of sorts from the fact that he wore a coat of blue cloth instead of a linen jacket, and top boots instead of canvas shoes.

None of us knew whether these men were soldiers, policemen or brigands. Neither did we understand a word of the torrent which all of them shouted at us. It was soon clear, however, that they intended us to accompany them to some unknown destination.

Thoughts of resistance were soon abandoned, for naked men outnumbered by armed horsemen, however dirty and undersized the latter may be, haven't much chance, especially when one's naked toes are in imminent danger of being trodden on by the hooves of the mules and horses which were pressing close to us under their riders' spurs.

We were permitted to put on only our trousers and were then marched off, up the sand dunes and across the cactus desert towards the town, carrying our other garments, from which we were surprised and delighted to find nothing had been taken.

Our escort, as soon as we set out, had ceased to shout at us and had subsided into a dejected apathy exactly matching the demeanour of their steeds. They slouched in their saddles and puffed at little black cigars, or cigarettes which seemed to be made of straw.

There was nothing we could do. None of us could understand or speak a word of our captors' language, so there was nothing for it but to submit, and march on under the fierce sun until something transpired.

Presently we reached the outskirts of the town, to discover that the Sabbath morning atmosphere had departed and that everyone was now very much alert. Every door and window was filled with laughing men, women and children to watch our procession pass.

Banter was exchanged with the soldiers, who had shaken themselves up and appeared to be trying to look like a conquering army returning from battle.

We prisoners prayed that we might meet some of the other people from the ship, who might be able to report on our predicament, but we knew that very few of them had come ashore, and we saw no one who could help us.

Presently we arrived at a big gateway through which we were marched into a courtyard, where the troop dismounted, and without ceremony pushed us into a cell, flung our clothes after us, and locked and bolted the door.

The big Norwegian then, for the first time, became violent. He threatened, both in his own tongue and in English, to "smash der face of der god dam sons of bitches." He put his big face to the bars of the grille in the door of our cell and shouted all sorts of threatening imprecations at the soldiers who, now apparently satisfied with their day's work, were discarding their weapons and accoutrements and preparing to enjoy a well-earned rest. They only grinned at the angry Norwegian, who, no doubt, knew that he was quite safe behind the bars of his cell and the bars of language.

We began to realize that our position was serious. We had no idea what we were imprisoned for, or how long we were likely to be detained. There was no method by which we could communicate with the ship, or with any consul; if the town possessed such people.

Equally important was the fact that we were getting hungry and were already very thirsty after our walk in the intense heat, and the bathe in the hot sea.

We tried to make signs to our gaolers that we required a

drink of water. We shouted "water" in four languages, but nothing had any effect on our captors, who were intent only on going to sleep in the shade of the high wall on the far side of the courtyard.

Then the thought of a cool draught of beer occurred to us. We shouted the magic word through the bars, with instant effect. It is obviously a word of world-wide comprehension. Several soldiers jumped up and ran towards us making signs of complete understanding and that, if we could produce the cash, they would produce the beer.

Quickly we collected amongst us the equivalent of about five shillings in mixed silver currency.

"Der svine keep der money and no get der beer, I guess," said the little German.

"Very likely," I replied, "but we must take a chance and see what happens."

We handed the money through the bars and the soldiers grinned delightedly and ran off.

A moment later they returned carrying an entire case of beer.

The whole troop was now awake and, though dressed only in their underclothes, were evidently intent on a party.

They opened the door of our cell. Some entered, while others squatted outside and watched while the bottles were opened, with a wrapt expression on their swarthy faces.

The beer tasted like a lukewarm mixture of vinegar and methylated spirit, but had a satisfying reaction which suddenly put an idea into my mind.

"We'd better get another case of this stuff," I suggested. "If we can only get these fellows off their guard, we can make a rush for it presently and get back to the ship before they have time to put on their gear."

The suggestion was accepted gladly. The price of two more cases was forthcoming at once, and messengers were despatched to buy them.

Almost simultaneously with their return, commotion and consternation struck the soldiery. They jumped up and stood to attention. Some tried to grab and don a jacket or a helmet. All looked extremely foolish.

Then, through the main gate, came a ponderous civilian. Apoplectic, asthmatic and very angry he appeared to be. His little eyes were red as he abused the fellow who was no doubt the leader of the troop, but who was now unrecognizable as such in his underclothes only.

Then the fat man turned to us and proceeded apparently to abuse us for a minute or two. What he said I shall never know, or care.

Presently he stopped, mopped his head with a huge red handkerchief, produced a note-book from his pocket and wrote in it, tore out the page and presented it to us with an angry flourish, spat violently and departed.

The soldiers at once relaxed and treated the incident as ended as they attacked the fresh supply of beer.

Anxiously I studied the paper in my hand. Thereon were two lines of strange words and at the end of each a dollar sign (\$), or something similar, and the quite legible figures 5,000, with the total 10,000 below.

I felt myself pale as I read it. I knew that we couldn't muster 10,000 pence between us, much less 10,000 dollars.

My companions read the ominous document and were, for a moment, silent.

"Swine! Dirty black swine!" hissed the Dutchman.

"Mein gott, it is der ransom vich dey make," said the German, "for ever we in prison stay."

The Norwegian looked as if he intended to knock out the nearest soldiers with the bottle he held, but, after staring at them awhile with blazing eyes, decided that it was better to drink its contents.

"There's nothing for it," I remarked, "but to let these fellows drink all the beer they can, then shove them aside and make a rush for the street."

An hour later, when two more cases of beer had been swallowed and several of the little soldiers were already comatose and others maudlin, I gave the signal for our rush.

With a shout, we jumped up and capsized the men who were not already on the ground, and made a bolt for the street. It was all as easy as possible. The soldiers were too surprised to offer any resistance and their weapons were all on the other

side of the courtyard. We heard a great deal of shouting as we turned out of the gate and, at our best speed, made for the direction in which we thought the ship lay.

Street after street we traversed in our wild rush, expecting every moment to come to the open space about the dock.

As it was Sunday afternoon, I suppose, the populace was asleep again, for the streets were empty. Only an occasional dog ran out and yapped at us as we passed.

We were just beginning to think that we were lost when our ship's hooter gave a warning blast that she was about to depart very shortly. The welcome sound gave us direction immediately. In another moment we were dashing across the cobble-stones of the wharf and leapt on to the gangway just as half a dozen of our recent captors, now dressed but unbuttoned, galloped round a corner.

They pulled up their mounts at the foot of the gangway and gave vent to a torrent of abuse and gesticulation.

Gasping for breath and spouting sweat, I tried to explain the situation to the ship's captain, who, smilingly, stood at the top of the gangway. He looked at the ransom note I gave him, pulled a couple of dirty bank-notes from his pocket, crumpled them up casually and flung them down to the angry soldiers below.

Immediately their demeanour changed. Their dark faces smiled happily. They doffed their brass hats and waved them at us in the most genial way, and appeared to convey that they were entirely satisfied with the outcome of the incident.

As the gangway was hauled up and the ship moved away from the wharf, I asked the captain to explain.

"But that ransom note? Ten thousand dollars! Surely that wasn't what you gave them?"

"No, no, mine friend, not dollars. Ten mil reis. Dey has funny money in Brazil. A tousand reis is about ninepence in English money."

I thought rapidly that the cost of the beer we had drunk was much more than the "ransom"!

"But what were we arrested for? What had we done wrong?"

"Ah! Dey's very good people in Brazil. For bazing on

Sunday you pay five mil reis. For bazing mit nodings on you pay five mil reis. Ha, ha, it is an old trick dey always play mit de English on Sundays here. De English always must baze in de sea when it be hot, no?"

So that's the welcome I got when I first set foot on South American soil. I shall have to remember in future that no matter how lax the morals of the people, the snakes and lizards of any old desert must not be shocked by nudity, especially on a Sunday!

No more now. We arrive at Buenos Aires in a couple of days' time.

I will write you from there, as I shall probably be some time before finding a job.

BUENOS AIRES. I CHOOSE A JOB AND TRAVEL NORTH

No. 4 *In the train. En route from Buenos Aires to Tucuman*

THINGS have moved very swiftly since my last letter. Here I am, sitting in a first class railway carriage more luxurious than I thought existed, with a job already fixed with the railway company at the end of the journey of about seven hundred miles.

Buenos Aires gave me a shock. If I had thought about it at all, I imagined a settlement of whitewashed or log cabins on the bank of a big river, with cowboys driving herds of cattle through unpaved streets to wooden wharves where the ships lay. I imagined Indian camps, and alligators basking on the river bank, or some such romantic nonsense.

Well, first of all there is no river. That is to say, its far bank is so far off that it is quite out of sight below the horizon. Then the docks are really magnificent: miles of gleaming cut granite wharves, with beautiful stone and brick premises and stores stretching in all directions. Swagger tugs and smart

customs launches dash about everywhere with their officers in spotless white and blue uniforms.

Beyond the docks lies a magnificent modern city, substantial and solid in a way which makes Rio look like a bit of gaudy scenery from a musical opera.

The streets are full of splendid carriages with perfectly-groomed horses. Even motor-cars seem to be far ahead of any one saw in London; gleaming with silver lamps and fittings and with smartly uniformed drivers.

The shops are really astounding in their modernity. One might be in Paris. Sumptuous hotels and restaurants, with liveried servants at their doors, abound everywhere.

Some of the streets are twice the width of Regent Street, with groves of palm and orange trees planted down their centres.

Everywhere there is bustling activity. Even the many men and women who sit about the pavement cafés have an air of eager industry as they discuss their affairs.

It is all very invigorating. One feels that here is a thriving new country with none of the handicaps of outworn traditions.

I was a little disappointed to find things so civilized everywhere; but I am peculiar in my dislike of progress. Anyhow, here are signs of a progress which may be different, and the country is large enough to contain all the pioneering romance which I shall want in my lifetime, as I have already seen from this train.

I was in Buenos Aires for six hours, so could only get a view of its more modern aspect. As the train left the station, we passed through an area of poor streets, and settlements of hovels where not even streets were visible, just shacks of old packing-cases and tin, clustered together without plan of any kind. So no doubt the progress and beauty of the wealthier districts is accompanied by the usual squalor and poverty of any other great city.

Directly our ship docked she was boarded by efficient immigration officers, speaking every known tongue, apparently.

In a few moments we had been lined up and divided into groups with an uncanny intuition concerning our capabilities. As quickly we were marched off to the immigration office,

where an abrupt but courteous official dealt with each case. He rapped out offers of various jobs which might suit me, pointing the while with a long cane at a large map on the wall. Presently he came to one with the Central Argentine Railway Company at its northern terminus, Tucuman.

"Assistant to traffic manager. Paid employment while learning language. Free quarters provided. Tucuman a fine old town at the foot of the Andes. Great sugar growing district." He tapped the map with his cane in a convincing manner, as though he knew it was where I wanted to go; which was true. But I fear it was the mention of the mountains, and not the job of assistant traffic manager, which decided me.

In another moment I was given a first class railway ticket and told to be at the station by six o'clock. My baggage would be labelled and put on the train.

"A telegram will be sent to Tucuman, so that you will be met there and given further instructions. Good-day, Señor, and good fortune in our country. Next please."

So I was dismissed. Nothing could have been more expeditious.

We are now travelling through the vast plains which stretch unbroken for hundreds of miles between the Andes and the sea. Fields of wheat and other crops stretch, for thousands of acres on either hand, without a fence. Paddocks with several thousand head of pure-bred cattle grazing in knee-high pasture make a picture which puts poor old England into medieval shade.

Now we are out of the cultivated area and running through wild prairie land. The cattle are less numerous, and less uniform in type, but still in vast herds. The dust and heat are getting very trying. All the carriage windows are shut and the electric fans working, yet the dust of the prairie, stirred up by the train, creeps in everywhere. Everything we eat and drink is slightly gritty with it. Rivulets of sweat have run down the faces of all the passengers, leaving muddy tracks. All our eyelashes are grey with dust, so that everyone seems to have aged in a few hours.

However, we are racing towards the mountains. The food on the train is excellent and I couldn't wish for anything different.

What does a little prairie dust matter? Better than the smoke of London anyhow.

Later. This train was actually stopped by a swam of locusts just now!

I saw a cloud ahead of the train and saw the passengers pointing at it with mild interest and expected a thunderstorm.

Presently enormous red-brown grasshoppers hit the window-panes, first in ones or twos, then in dozens, then in hundreds, and I saw that the whole sky about us was absolutely full of them and darkened as by a black thunderstorm. Looking up amongst their teeming myriads was rather like looking at a heavy fall of snow against a black sky.

Presently the train faltered and seemed to shudder, then came to a halt.

A polite passenger, noticing my interest and surprise, explained in delightfully bad English—which amused him as much as it did me—that there were so many crushed locusts—*langostas*, he calls them—under the engine's wheels that they will not grip the line.

"Ze coachman, 'e now fix 'im a box of sand on ze face of ze machine and so we go. No?"—that last negative in a charming tone of interrogation, as though asking if everything met with my consent and approval.

Sure enough, in a few moments we were off again, and in five minutes the swarm of locusts was but a dim cloud astern; only a few stragglers hit the windows occasionally.

Must knock off now and go and chat with my polite informant, who looks as if he wants to exercise his English.

I shall post this in Tucuman as soon as we arrive to-morrow morning.

Next morning. Life is very strange! It is just daylight. I have scarcely slept a wink, though my sleeping berth is delightful. The dust and heat were too much for me altogether.

We are now running through the most desolate country. Miles and miles of barren land with gaunt and weird cactus plants as the only vegetation, except a very few gnarled and stunted bushes here and there.

Everywhere one sees the bleached skeletons of cattle. The whole land is a monotonous drab colour except for the

venomous grey-green of the cactus. There are a few ramshackle dwellings of adobe and thatch here and there, with bedraggled and sad-looking horses and mules tethered beside them.

Such human beings as one sees are equally dejected; they watch the train pass with dull interest as they stand by their miserable dwellings. Everything is the same drab colour. Only a lot of goats seem to thrive, and frisk away jauntily as the train rushes past.

Surprisingly, there are signs of vigorous activity amidst the desolate scene. Here and there, almost hidden in clouds of dust, are galloping horsemen, riding full tilt across the plain. Who or what they are, or where or whence they go or come in such a hurry, I cannot imagine. In such a dead landscape, where everything looks moribund, there can be no necessity for haste.

There are a few cattle still alive, but they have nothing to graze on, apparently, except a few tufts of dry grass, and are so poor that if anyone attempted to make them run I'm sure they would drop dead at once.

Away to the east there is a dark fringe to the horizon which may be forest land. My geography of the country is nil, but I imagine there may be a river away in that direction.

By jove! I glanced up after writing that sentence to discover that, almost in a flash, the entire scene has changed enormously.

We are in the midst of a green and fertile land with substantial white houses standing amidst groves of trees, with rich crops of maize and what I suppose is sugar-cane, all about them. Water gleams everywhere in irrigation ditches.

And yes! Looking ahead I see the mountains. My God! What a sight! Great piled-up masses of them! Grim, wild and rugged. We're there! Life is glorious after all.

Must collect my luggage.

"*Adios*," as we say in Spanish.

*I GO TO PRISON AGAIN**No. 5**Tucuman*

I HAVE been in prison again! Don't be alarmed. I am not turning into a gaol-bird, and am still innocent of any crime. In fact, I went to prison, this time, entirely voluntarily. No policemen or soldiers; I just went to prison, spent a night locked in a cell, and left the next morning without a stain on my character. A slight stain on my conscience perhaps, as you shall hear, but easily erased.

This is a fascinating old town, parts of it dating back to the seventeenth century I believe, when the Spanish conquistadores made it a base for exploring the mountains beyond. Also some sort of treaty was once signed here in seventeen hundred and something. The man who told me this seemed to think the treaty was as well known to history as the Battle of Hastings. Perhaps it is. I wouldn't know, of course, so I murmured, "Ah, yes," and left it at that.

I was met at the station by a very nice Englishman who had been sent by the traffic manager of the railway.

He took me at once to see his boss: a genial giant (English), who seemed as pleased to see me as if I had been an old friend instead of an emigrant seeking a job. He at once appointed me assistant station-master at a place called Tacanas.

Burrows, an assistant traffic manager, then took me to a hotel, where I was to spend the one night before going to my job: the queerest, noisiest, most fly-ridden hotel in the world I should say. It is run by a fat little Italian and an enormous wife. They shouted at me in Spanish or Italian—or both—with a few words of English, at the top of their voices and laughed tremendously at the same time.

As there seemed to be fifty people in the front-room of the hotel—a mixture of general shop, drinking saloon, gambling den and restaurant—all shouting and laughing, drinking, arguing and crashing dominoes about on iron tables, with a mechanical

piano of many horse-power going full blast all the while, it is not surprising that I didn't understand what they said.

And the flies! Millions of them. The air was thick with them; it seemed that anything one ate or drank must contain a large proportion of flies.

Everyone present seemed to know Burrows, and wanted to stand him a drink. He was surrounded by a crush of men forcing glasses of wine or beer on him, which he laughingly refused.

Several minutes passed before he could come to my rescue and explain to the hotel proprietor that I required a room for one night and, more urgently, a bath.

I was led through the babel into a quiet patio behind. All the town houses in this country seem to be built round a patio or open courtyard, usually containing a shady tree or two. Off this patio opened the bedrooms with a gallery running round above, on to which opened more rooms.

I was given a room on the ground floor. Its door was a wire gauze mosquito guard, and as we opened it a cloud of flies flew out and a new cloud flew in. The furniture was crude; a bed sagging in the middle, one corner of it propped up by an oil-drum in lieu of a leg.

The bed-linen was very clean. The sheets and pillow slips frilled with much lace-work.

A rickety chest of drawers, one chair, a spidery iron contrivance supporting an enamel wash-basin. A dozen nails in the wall to hang clothes on completed the equipment of the room.

No, there was one other useful article, under the bed, with a large eye painted inside the bottom. A queer form of joke.

My luggage was dumped in this room, presently, by some ragged half-breed Indian fellows who, I noticed, had no expectation of a tip.

Here Burrows left me with a promise to look me up later in the day and take me round the town to meet the other Englishmen who live in Tucuman. They are not more than a dozen or so, I believe, who foregather on most evenings to drink aperitifs; or *aperativos*, as they call them here.

My demands for a bath caused a considerable disturbance.

The words *Senor Ingles*, and *baño*, were shouted about from floor to floor and room to room and caused a good deal of laughter.

Presently I was led to the back of the patio and shown a sort of scullery with a deep concrete trough along one side of it, from which some women were busy clearing the sacks of potatoes and strings of garlic and onions which it contained.

I was made to understand that presently I should bath therein, and very soon, as I undressed in my room, I heard buckets of water being poured into the trough and was told that my bath was ready.

It looked anything but inviting, as the potatoes had left a lot of soil behind, but, having asked for the cheapest hotel and not having had a bath for nearly a month, with the exception of a soupy sea-bathe at Santos, I was in no mood to criticize.

A worse trouble was that the scullery place had no door and that many of the patrons of the hotel were obviously taking an amused interest in my actions, and more particularly in the rather gaudy dressing-gown which I had donned.

I refused to be dissuaded by anything and slid into the muddy but refreshingly cool water immediately.

I should tell you that the atmosphere was about twice as hot as the hottest day in England, so that one would have been almost glad to bath in ink, if cold enough.

As soon as I began to soap myself I saw, through the lather, that a dozen or so people, of both sexes, were crowding round the door of the scullery to watch me.

Their expressions showed that they were sharing my enjoyment of the cool, if muddy, water and they seemed to be exchanging approving comments about the novel idea of bathing as a habit, and were not at all ashamed of my nakedness, as I was.

I began to wonder if any of them would suddenly decide to share the trough with me. It was big enough for three people to bath in together.

Having dressed and eaten a substantial meal of unrecognizable dishes, tasting principally of garlic, for which I fought a fierce battle with the flies, I followed the almost universal local custom and went to my room for a siesta.

I say almost universal, because a few riotous souls still put nickels in the mechanical piano and shouted over their drink and dominoes. The latter seems to be a national sport of deadly importance.

Neither the noise nor the flies kept me awake, and I slept for three hours and woke feeling much refreshed though sweating profusely.

I wandered about the streets awhile and found much to amuse me. The streets are mostly quite unpaved and are a foot deep in soft dust. Pair-horsed open cabs gallop full tilt everywhere, kicking up choking clouds of which no one takes any notice.

The populace are mostly dark-skinned and handsome, the younger women remarkably so. They have the most inviting eyes imaginable. Very disturbing at first to a normally reserved Englishman; but one soon recognizes that there is nothing personal in these glances, and that it is every man's duty and privilege to pay homage to their owner's charm by returning an equally interested gaze.

After ten minutes I found my features set in a sort of perpetual leer, which I fear may be permanent, so be prepared when you next see me.

I made only one attempt to speak to a beautiful lady who sat at her doorway and whose eyes seemed to demand that I should forthwith propose to her.

I had barely touched my hat and said, "*Buen dia, Señorita,*" (you see I am learning Spanish) when she leapt up from her seat with a look of frightened indignation, ran in and slammed the door in my face. My proposal was abandoned. Just as well perhaps, as I had already almost exhausted my knowledge of her language.

At six o'clock I found my way back to my hotel to meet Burrows, as arranged.

The piano, the dominoes and the flies were busier than ever. Vermouth, gin and strange brands of *aperitivos* were being drunk instead of wine and beer. An atmosphere of gaiety spread everywhere and one became aware that the town was really only just awakening.

The people in this part of the world are very largely

nocturnal, it seems, and only come to life as the sun goes down.

Burrows arrived in a galloping landau whose horses pulled up with a crash and a cloud of dust. I was invited to get in, and, with a yell and a cracking of his whip, our driver sent his skinny horses off again at a gallop, round one corner after another on two wheels, until we came to the centre of the town.

Here was a broad *plaza*, with many palm, orange and other shady trees, well laid-out gardens, streets actually paved, handsome buildings, and wide pavements with crowds of people sitting outside restaurants. In the centre was a bandstand with a gorgeously-uniformed band, round which strolled the youth and beauty of the town, the sexes most scrupulously separated, but exchanging glances which were to my mind almost indecent.

Our vehicle had slowed down and joined the procession of others which drove very slowly round and round the *plaza*. I noticed many fine private carriages, beautifully kept, with equally fine horses pulling them. Some actually had cockaded coachmen and footmen, uniformed in complete London style, though I doubt if their employers had any idea of the meaning of the cockades.

It seems that these rich people keep their splendid carriages for the sole purpose of driving round and round their only *plaza* each evening. There are no other paved roads on which to use them.

Suddenly it was night. The *plaza* and the buildings around were flooded with electric light. The street lamps flashed and crackled as the current bridged the gaps between the carbons.

Fireflies vied feebly as they frolicked amongst the branches of the trees, now a weird green in the electric blaze.

We halted our cab and dismissed it and strolled with the throng about the bandstand. I noticed that only one side of the *plaza* was well illuminated and contained many gay restaurants whose fronts were ablaze with lights. The other three sides were more or less in shadow, and on their pavements were crowded the poorer people of the town. They are largely of Indian blood; their dark-skinned faces and flashing eyes

made a queer foil for the fashionable people about the bandstand, whom they had come to watch while they listened to the music.

Hard to believe that so many extremely beautiful young women could exist in one small town. And what wonderful frocks! There is a tremendous wave of prosperity going on in this remote part of the world, so that the local beauties think nothing of having frocks and hats sent from Paris.

The warm tropic fragrance of the night, the heady orange blossom scent, the perfumes of those lovely women, the glamour of their dark eyes, which they used like languid searchlights, were altogether intoxicating.

The young men of the place are a poor lot by comparison with their sisters. Uniform in size, type and dress, they look like a male chorus. Sallow, thin, dressed in the blackest of suits and hats, with the whitest linen and the shiniest of patent-leather shoes, it was difficult to tell one from another.

Apparently it is contrary to all moral codes for single men to speak to single women—that is, amongst the wealthier classes—except in the presence of a chaperon. So that one and all are compelled to exchange their more intimate thoughts by looks alone, which explains much, for if their eyes tell the truth, it is not surprising that their elders insist on chaperonage and that the chaperones look like ogresses.

I hear that at thirty a woman of these parts is old, and has abandoned all youthful vanities. The older ones I have seen are certainly grim and forbidding enough: in plain black cashmere dresses, with a length of the same stuff over their heads by way of mantilla, under which hard and vigilant eyes glitter threateningly in a setting of yellow skin.

I hear that all proposals of marriage must be made in the presence of one or more of these chaperons, and that even an engaged couple are not permitted to be alone together for a moment until after the marriage ceremony. Obviously no one has much opinion of the self-restraint of the younger generation.

Growing tired of a glamour which held such little promise, Burrows led me to the largest *café* or *confiteria*: The Paris.

Passing through the throng of tables on the pavement, where

everyone seemed to be playing dominoes or shaking dice boxes, we went inside.

A vast place. Hundreds of little marble-topped tables, and nearly as many waiters. Walls almost entirely mirrors from floor to ceiling reflecting the whole place again and again into infinity. Counters piled high with every sort of cold food: turkeys, fowls, hams, tongues, sucking pigs, boars' heads, mountains of sandwiches and whole seas of pastries of every shape, size and colour.

The place was not full as we entered, for until the dinner hour, at about seven-thirty, the populace takes the air about the bandstand—and a queer, volcanic, earthquake sort of air it is.

Burrows led me to a corner of the room where, apparently by regular custom, were congregated the Englishmen who work in Tucuman. Never more than a dozen, there were only six, including ourselves, on this occasion.

Having been introduced and given a cheery welcome, I joined the dice-shaking for the honour of paying for the drinks which the waiter brought us. Round after round of assorted drinks were swallowed in quick succession, far quicker than the dice decided who should pay for them. I was soon very bewildered and hoped that someone more accustomed to such conviviality was keeping account of what I owed.

They are a very confiding lot of people hereabouts apparently, for the waiters left a bottle of whisky at our table and left us to say how many drinks we had from it.

Gradually the restaurant filled up, mostly with men; only a few middle-aged women with their husbands and children. I noticed that the older men are a much finer-looking lot than the younger ones. They have a hard, weather-beaten look, as of men who have faced the elements. I suppose they lived here before the present prosperity came and had to work hard on the sugar plantations and lumber camps, on which the district thrives. Now they are all prosperous and, from what I hear, like to employ Englishmen to manage their estates while they live in leisure in the town.

Englishmen are liked and trusted by these people in the most flattering way. Long may we deserve their faith. Judging by what happened last night I am surprised that it exists.

My memory is distinctly vague from about nine o'clock onwards. I remember that we dined at the same marble-topped table and that we dined for each course, the whole bill, the wines, the coffee, the tips, and everything else to do with the meal. The dice are used here to settle everything apparently, and I can imagine a man light-heartedly dicing for another man's wife.

The restaurant got noisier and noisier and more crowded as the hours passed. A stage across one end of it was occupied by a variety performance of which no one took much notice; except for one turn, where three women in evening frocks sang to us, then suddenly turned round to display the fact that their backs were entirely naked from head to foot except for a string round their waists !

Periodically the whole place was darkened to show a cinematograph picture, or an instalment of one. That was quite popular as entertainment, being rather a novelty.

It may have been before or after midnight when I found myself shaking the dice-box for yet another hazard. I had got beyond caring what it was and rejected the suggestion of the other fellows that I should not participate for some reason or other. The word prison floated into or about my ears, but made no impression on my muddled brain.

I was surprised at the laughter and praise of my sportsmanship which greeted the fact that I had apparently won the prize—whatever it was.

Immediately we all left the restaurant and crowded into a cab and galloped off into the outskirts of the town.

I was vaguely conscious of heavily-armed soldiery meeting us when the cab stopped, of great gates being unlocked and locked again, of a white-haired old Englishman shaking my hand and showing me an extremely welcome bed, upon which I was thankful to fling myself and sleep the sleep of the just—or the intoxicated.

This morning when I woke I found that the bed was in a prison cell and that, as far as I knew or anyone seemed to care, I was in for life.

No time for more now. I'll tell you the rest of the story in my next.

TO THE DESERT

No. 6

Tacanas

I SHALL have ample time to write the longest of letters from here, as my work will apparently not occupy more than a couple of hours a day.

My job is that of assistant station-master. It sounds important, but as only two or three trains a day stop here, and the express—*Rapido*—flashes through morning and evening, my job is not what you may imagine.

But I'll come to that later. First I must tell you about my second imprisonment since setting foot in South America.

It seems that some years ago, during one of the periodical land booms which overwhelm this country, an elderly Englishman floated into Tucuman from the mountains beyond. He had spent many years there in various enterprises and had accumulated little else than an inordinate thirst for whisky. Being educated and looking venerable and trustworthy—he was never drunk, he just couldn't get drunk, yet was never quite sober—he found employment with a company of South American adventurers who were buying and selling land at great profit and in vast areas.

Old John—I won't be more explicit about his name—was made secretary of the Company. He spoke Spanish like a native, his manners were courtly and he knew all about accountancy, so the job suited him as he suited the job.

For a few months all went well, until suddenly the land boom ended. There were no more buyers. Those who held the title deeds began to come to Tucuman from all parts to have a look at their newly-acquired estates and to see if they could be developed profitably.

Unfortunately several owners claimed each estate and others claimed estates which were non-existent. All of old John's courtly manner couldn't explain these discrepancies or calm the indignation of the victims.

He wired and wrote and telephoned to the directors of the

Company, but they were not to be found anywhere in the Republic.

John alone remained, with some office equipment and an empty safe, as representative of the Company.

He was arrested, and though he protested, truthfully, that he had no knowledge of the fraudulent sales of land and had dealt only with the accounts and correspondence, he was sent to prison until such time as restitution should be made to the defrauded clients; which meant a life sentence.

Now the prisons in these parts are very different from those at home. The prisoners are fed by their friends and are allowed as many visitors as they like. The one where old John is, is a collection of one-storied buildings around a large open space, about an acre or so.

The prisoners do just what they like all day within the walls, and are all locked in their cells at night. They are guarded by a great number of gaolers, all armed with sabres and revolvers, who look as if they are prepared to use their weapons on the least provocation.

No one seems to care much or anything about the prisoners except their friends and relatives. The gaolers are responsible for holding a certain number of prisoners and that is all. As long as their numbers tally nothing more is asked.

It was found that as long as there was one Englishman in Cell Number 43 every night, nobody worried about his description, therefore the Englishmen of Tucuman take turns to do proxy for old John for a night, while he comes out for a beano round the town.

The matter is, of course, decided by the dice. Last night I, quite inadvertently, was the winner, and took my place in the cell while old John came out to enjoy himself.

I woke at daylight and stared at my surroundings in horror.

A cell about eight feet square. Walls polished greasily by the generations of sweaty bodies which had rubbed against them. A trestle bed of wood and canvas. A bookshelf with quite an interesting lot of books. A few plates and cups. A few clothes neatly arranged on another shelf.

Never have I seen such a pathetic attempt at orderliness in such a drab and squalid hole.

The few books and the clean bed linen told of the kindness of friends and contrasted horribly with the greasiness of the walls and floor, which no friendship could overcome.

As I looked at these things I was of course quite, or almost quite, ignorant of their meaning. I had a vague recollection of having come there voluntarily, and that I was in some sort of prison. Then terrible alarm and panic made me leap up on the bed and stare out of the small barred window above it.

I wanted to shout for help. To tell anyone who might be within hearing that I had been trapped; deceived by villains posing as my friends and fellow countrymen, until they had tricked me into this infernal cell.

The sight that confronted my eyes as I stared through the bars of the small window effectively silenced me. I gasped with astonishment and awe.

The sun was rising somewhere behind the prison. My window faced west, and high in the sky to north and south stretched range upon range of mighty mountains. Massive, rugged, silent and eternal, rose and grey as the rising sun lit the peaks and valleys, they seemed at once to reproach me and all the puny human race which crawled for a few brief years in the dust at their feet.

My predicament faded into insignificance. Whether I had been trapped into a lifetime in that prison or not, became a matter of infinite unimportance. I was merely an insect, beneath the regard of the architect of those mighty ranges stretching across an entire continent.

A month earlier I hardly knew where the Andes might be found on a map, yet here I was, staring at their eternal grandeur through the bars of a squalid prison cell at their very feet.

Moreover, in the interval I had been in prison in Brazil. I felt in that moment that I must treat life more seriously or sink. It was as though God Himself sat enthroned amidst those remote and silent peaks and warned me that life had a greater purpose than I had known.

How long I stood there gazing I do not know. I was conscious of the presence of several armed gaolers in the prison yard, some strolling about, others lounging in chairs, others apparently asleep on rugs outside their quarters. They appeared to belong

to another world to the one I stared at, and to the vision of eternity with which those mountain ranges filled my brain.

Then suddenly the vision faded. As the sun rose the sky became a golden mist which shrouded the distant peaks from my sight. Only the nearer forest clad slopes remained.

Almost simultaneously I heard the soft thud of galloping horses in the dust of the road outside, the rattle of a vehicle and the shouting of the driver.

Another moment and I heard the welcome sound of English voices, the clanging of gates unlocked and locked.

A mild interest amongst the lounging soldiery in the yard as two of my friends of the night before, now dishevelled and weary, followed a venerable figure towards my cell.

Old John had evidently enjoyed himself. His white hair and beard glistened in the sunlight as, with head high, he waved well-tended hands and declaimed in cultured tones some fragments of what sounded like classical poetry, which I didn't recognise.

A gaoler, for all his show of weapons and authority, shabby and paltry beside old John's dignified yet slightly inebriated bearing, came forward with the keys of the cells.

In another moment my hand was clasped by old John's and he was thanking me for the few hours' freedom I had been able to give him.

His manner was delightful, his words full of humour and philosophic resignation, yet there was a look at the back of his fine eyes, now blurred with the drink he had taken during the night, which told of the very limit of horror and fear.

It was as though another human soul peeped out from some cage within the human form of old John. A soul which silently pleaded for release. It distressed me horribly.

As I left the cell John was taking a book from his shelf, declaiming in Latin the while and apparently preparing to increase his knowledge. Queer that the desire for learning should survive years of imprisonment and an inordinate thirst for whisky.

Having duly rewarded the gaolers, my sleepy and barely articulate companions led me out of the prison gates to the waiting cab, and I was once more a free man. So ended my second experience of imprisonment within a fortnight.

I hope it will be the last.

Later in the morning I called at the traffic manager's office at the station and was given a pass to this place Tacanas, and was told that I should stay here until I knew the language. Tacanas is about fifty miles south of Tucuman, in the arid desert country I told you of. Nothing but cactus plants, a few shrivelled trees and bushes and the bleached skeletons of cattle everywhere. You can't imagine anything more drab and desolate.

There is no town or village anywhere within sight; only a row of thirty or so adobe shacks, with tin or thatched roofs, on the east side of the station. One house is a little more pretentious, as it has recently been lime-washed, is larger than the rest and has at some time been a shop, though now closed and shuttered.

The station-master met me on my arrival and seemed glad to see me. He is a tiny little fellow, only about nine inches wide but full of assurance and very talkative. What he talks about I don't know. He knows no word of English and ignores the fact that I know little more Spanish, for he talks to me at great length each time he sees me, which isn't often.

My spirits dropped below zero as the train moved out of the station.

There were a few half-Indian creatures, dressed in rags, loafing about the platform, who seemed to melt away into the landscape as soon as the train had departed, and there was I, horrified by the desolation about me, being jabbered at in an unknown language by the perky little station-master.

For five minutes he strutted around me and chattered, reminding me of a genial bantam-cock wanting to be fed. I could only grin and look more and more foolish. I believe I quoted bits of "The Walrus and the Carpenter," as it seemed to be as appropriate to the occasion as anything else.

Presently he led me to the back of the station, facing the row of little dwellings, and showed me a room with a bedstead and an iron washstand as its only furnishing. No bedclothes, no anything at all else.

Then he indicated, talking volubly all the time, that I should

move my luggage there; which I did, and he then left me for several hours.

I sat on my trunk and wondered. I think I contemplated suicide. I saw no sign of any place where food might be obtained and knew no means of asking the station-master anything. Once I got up and wandered in the direction of the row of houses, where one or two almost human figures, the same drab colour as all about them, occasionally moved. I was greeted by a dozen half-starved and ferocious-looking dogs, again of the same drab colour, who rose from the dust, where they had been sleeping, and rushed at me with teeth bared.

I had difficulty in hiding my alarm. I tried to look as if I had no intention of approaching the houses, and as I slowly circled back to the station the dogs snapped at the air just out of kicking reach, and then, having apparently aroused their parasites, sat down and scratched themselves.

The station-master had disappeared into his own quarters, whence I heard the strident voice of a nagging wife and the sound of petulant children whining. Otherwise there was a horrible silence in every direction.

Somewhere about six o'clock I noticed dust clouds rising far off across the plain beyond the row of houses.

The golden glare of the day was fading, as the sun went down behind the mountains to the west, and I was able to see that on the horizon to the north-east was a fringe of forest. It was from there that the dust clouds were approaching.

Presently I heard faintly the drumming of hooves and saw that the dust clouds were small groups of horsemen galloping towards the station.

Five minutes later everything about me had changed astonishingly. Twenty or more picturesque horsemen, dressed in tough linen and raw-hide, with soft hide riding boots, gigantic spurs, gay sashes with long sheath knives and sometimes revolvers tucked into them, had galloped up to the station and were dismounting and greeting each other with joyful shouts and laughing as if life in those dismal solitudes was the gayest of adventures.

They bowed to me most courteously, some shook my hand. One, who wore a pathetic imitation of English riding breeches

and carried an even worse imitation of a hunting-crop, accosted me in English.

"How do, Meester! Nice day," he announced, to the obvious admiration of all those about him and to my great joy at finding someone to interpret for me.

I liberated a flood of pent-up words, only to be greeted by a roar of laughter from the other men who stood watching us when they, and I, found that my friend in the breeches had exhausted his entire vocabulary of English.

Many of the men were clanking about the platform of the station with their vast spurs ringing as they shouted for the station-master, whose name seemed to be Heffy.

Presently he emerged from his quarters and was greeted with much merriment as everyone crowded round him. He had a bundle of telegraph forms in his hands which everyone tried to snatch from him good-naturedly. I know now that he is the only source of news and that he collects any interesting items over the railway telegraph and disseminates them each evening to anyone who comes to the station. Newspapers are unknown in this wilderness, as also the telephone.

Five minutes were spent in reading and discussing the news items; then my arm was grabbed in the friendliest fashion and I was led, all the others following, towards the row of huts. Night had now fallen in the sudden way that it does in these latitudes, and I saw that one of the huts had discarded one of its walls and transformed itself into a shop.

Tables and chairs had appeared on the dusty road outside. Rows of bottles and glasses gleamed on the shelves within and a fat fellow, who looked like a Levantine Jew, grinned from behind an improvised bar.

Everyone pressed drinks on me, and, for all my good resolutions when gazing at the mountains at daybreak, I found it hard to refuse these very friendly *gauchos*, or cowboys, or whatever they are.

I shall not be long learning the language, for everyone is most anxious to teach me.

All of them told me the Spanish for everything within sight and reach, and made me try to pronounce the words. Their good-natured merriment at my efforts was delightful. The

patience with which they corrected me, and their obvious pleasure when at last I got the right pronunciation, would be a wonderful lesson to all the schoolmasters I have known.

Only one of them showed any sort of wish to know the English equivalent of their words. That was my little friend in the breeches. His attempts at pronouncing English were even more comic than mine in Spanish. I expect he is an European Spaniard and not a native. He is smaller than the other fellows, (with the exception of the station-master), and they are big athletic-looking chaps, who, for all their merri-ment, have a dangerous glint in their dark eyes which commands respect. Or perhaps it is something in the shape or set of their eyes or eyelids, as of men who are used to facing danger and hardship and whose expression shows their courage and endurance.

I soon made it clear that I was hungry, and, at once, I had two tins of salmon and two of tongue and some bread put before me. I had nearly satisfied my appetite when the fat proprietor of the establishment put a dish of rice and fried eggs on the table and I had to tackle that as well.

In the midst of the noisy party, when everyone was talking and drinking and eating, the station-master signified that he wanted me to follow him. It was very dark as we walked across to the station. The dogs rushed at us, but were soon put to flight by the station-master stooping as though to pick up a missile—a trick worth knowing. The station-master gave me a great shock by showing me that one part of my duties would be to fill and light the station lamps, and the lamps for the signals. He introduced me to the lamp-room and made the necessary signs as he talked rapidly. Having filled the lamps, I was shown where to put them and how to hoist the signal lamp by a rope and pulley.

When I had completed the job and arrived on the platform once more—the opposite side of the station is a goods shed only—the station-master's wife, about four times his size, came out and shouted something at her spouse.

He went into the station office and did some Morse business with the telegraph instrument for a moment—apparently he

and his wife both handle the machine—then came out and stared down the line to the south.

I followed his gaze along the miles and miles of rails which stretch across the plain as straight as a gun barrel and saw a faint gleam of light.

Still talking, the station-master pointed towards it, looked at the station clock, then led me back to the inn, or shop, or restaurant, or whatever it is, that we had recently left.

I had discovered that a very mild and not at all unpleasant bottled beer was on sale there, so was able to join the party without fear of getting too drunk.

After half an hour or so the station-master once more indicated that he wanted me. (By this time he was calling me by name, which sounds like Don Kwon, but is actually spelt like Byron's amorous hero's).

Back to the station we went. More playing with the buzzing instrument, with the trembling needle flickering sentimentally on its dial. Then, looking down the line, we could see the lights of the approaching train, much nearer but still out of hearing; which will give you an idea of the immensity of the prairie.

We crossed to the goods shed, which the station-master unlocked. He showed me a pile of hides which were to be despatched, and how to complete the consignment note, or at least that is what I took it to be, for we counted the hides and wrote that number on the printed form.

By this time we could hear the train, and a few moments later its blazing headlights lit up the station as it slowed down.

The station-master caught a hoop of cane, which the engine driver held out, and removed some papers attached thereto.

An enormously long train; I counted thirty-odd wagons before the train stopped at a signal from the station-master's lamp as he saw the number of the wagon he was looking for.

From far away in the rear of the train a guard appeared with a swinging lamp and unlocked the wagon. Together we unloaded several cases of merchandise which were consigned to the station. The work made me sweat copiously, though the night was cool.

Next we loaded the stiff, sun-dried cow-hides into the same

wagon. The station-master shook hands with the guard. Lamps were waved and the train slowly disappeared along the track to the north.

I felt I had made a real beginning towards becoming a railway magnate.

We then rejoined the merry party at the inn, by this time getting rather rowdy and quarrelsome; which was not surprising considering that the men had been drinking vast quantities of neat gin, cognac and rum; also wine, from a barrel, in pints at a draught.

I found their attentions a little embarrassing and was glad to take the first opportunity to slip away, leaving my superior officer in a state of slithering garrulity to which no one paid the slightest attention.

If this is a sample of the nightly behaviour of the people in this desert land, I am in for a difficult time. I accepted their first friendly advances so gratefully and in such good faith that I shall find it almost impossible to avoid their companionship on other evenings. And, as far as I can see, there is absolutely nothing else to do here. I have nothing but an old hurricane lamp in my room, of about two candle-power, and as it is dark by about seven o'clock one can't very well spend the evening reading, even if one had anything to read, which I haven't.

However, there must be some alternative to this drinking game. I shall find it and tell you about it in my next.

GAY LIFE IN THE DESERT

No. 7

Tacanas

WEEKS since I last wrote. Much has happened since then.

First I must tell you that I can now carry on a quite useful conversation in Spanish. It is a very simple language to learn; when one is compelled to use it for every necessity of life, as I have to here, it comes to one very rapidly.

I was glad to discover that the festivities of the night of my arrival were not a regular custom. It was some sort of national feast day: anniversary perhaps of one of the many revolutions which clutter the history of the Republic, or perhaps some Saint's day.

Most nights are completely dead here. Not a light burns or a sound can be heard, except the occasional howling of a starved dog, from sunset until an hour before dawn.

Then one hears axes hewing logs, sees fires burning before each little house, and the still air is filled with the lovely smell of wood-smoke as the kettle is boiled for the early morning tea, which here is a peculiar brew called *maté*, served in gourds and sucked up through a silver tube. It is a most sustaining and refreshing drink and constitutes the only breakfast for most people.

Before it is light I hear the male occupants of the few houses ride away to their work in the forest country, which I find is only a few miles to the east.

There is quite a lot of industry carried on there apparently: cutting railway sleepers from hard-wood trees; fire logs for the railways—only wood is used for firing the engines here; fence posts; charcoal burning; also quite a lot of cattle-breeding, of a rough-and-ready type.

Apparently the soil is relatively fertile in the forest and much land has been cleared, where maize and other crops are grown. I hope soon to visit some of the landowners there, whose acquaintance I have made, and who are the friendliest people until they get drunk, which is pretty frequently; then they become very quarrelsome.

The principal landowner in this district is a delightful person, Dionicio Moreno by name. He is a heavily-built, boisterous fellow of about fifty, with a laugh that can be heard for miles. I first made his acquaintance in an extraordinary way.

I was busily practising the Morse code on the telegraph instrument in the booking-office, one day shortly after my arrival, when I heard a great noise of shouting and laughing and galloping of horses through the soft dust.

I got up to see what was happening, when four horsemen rode right through the little booking hall and on to the platform.

"Hi, my little station-master, where are you?" shouted a great voice—in Spanish, of course. I looked with much interest at the owner of the voice, and he looked at me and beamed the most genial of smiles as he doffed his wide hat with a magnificent gesture and dismounted to shake my hand.

Obviously he had heard all about me, as he called me Don Juan, and roared his pleasure at meeting me, and announced his own name.

The men with him were evidently his servants, and a fine-looking trio of *gauchos* they were. Mounted on splendid little horses, with silver-mounted saddles and bridles, all of wonderfully plaited raw-hide, with huge silver spurs at their heels and silver-mounted short whips suspended from their wrists.

The station-master emerged from his quarters struggling into his clothes. He was in a furious temper at the invasion of the sanctity of his station by this quartet of horsemen.

He hissed and spat venomously and tried to use his puny weight to push the riders off the platform.

Don Dionicio was delighted at the sight and roared with amusement. He smacked the little station-master on the back so heartily that he made him cough. Then he tried to lift him on to his own horse, but the little fellow kicked and struggled so violently that he had to abandon the idea.

Presently the station-master calmed down under the boisterous blandishments of Don Dionicio and ended by complying with the request made of him. He entered his quarters. The strident voice of his big wife (whom one rarely sees) was heard nagging at him, then he emerged with a handful of the paper money which is currency here (anything from about sixpence upwards in value, and often so torn and mended with stamp paper or sewn together with cotton as to be scarcely recognizable) and handed it over to Don Dionicio.

The latter roared his thanks, failed to persuade the station-master and myself to join him, mounted his horse and rode across to the houses, woke up the *boliche*—as they call the sort of inn and general store combined—and proceeded to make a day's holiday with his followers.

For a couple of hours we could hear the shouting and

laughing grow more boisterous as other horsemen rode in and joined the party.

About three o'clock a goods train came slowly from the south. For all its apparent dead level the land must have a slight gradient towards the north, for these huge trains, often with fifty or sixty great trucks, three or four times as large as any we know at home, come up quite slowly from the South.

We knew by telegraph that this train would not stop at Tacanas. It only had to slow down to exchange papers: rights of way, consignment notes, etc., with the station-master.

As the engine neared the station there was a shouting and a galloping outside, and on to the platform, once more, rode Don Dionicio with his followers. By now he was uproariously merry. His companions were in similar mood. Their horses had evidently been spurred into excitement in the short ride from the inn, for they were very restive, and looked dangerously so on the small platform of the station.

The station-master made no attempt this time to eject the intruders, but yapped viciously from the door of his quarters, like an angry and frightened Pomeranian dog.

Don Dionicio took no notice of him whatever. Instead, he made a sign to one of his men who carried an empty peach tin, and the man rode across the railway tracks (double here through the station), placed the tin on the platform of the goods shed opposite and returned just as the engine of the train—hooting excitedly—came into the station. (The platforms here are only a few inches above the track.)

The station-master, in his anger, had almost forgotten his cane hoop with the messages for the engine driver. He just had time to dash across and make the exchange as the engine passed.

I was watching him with interest, when I heard a revolver shot close by my ear. I turned and saw Don Dionicio sitting on his restive horse and deliberately shooting at the goods trucks as they passed, with an excited and happy look on his big face.

I had no idea what to do. I wondered if it was my duty to interfere; but to tackle an armed and none too sober man on horseback was no joke.



DON DIONICIO SITTING ON HIS RESTIVE HORSE AND
DELIBERATELY SHOOTING AT THE GOODS TRUCKS
AS THEY PASSED

I turned to look at the station-master and was relieved to see a grin of pained resignation on his thin little features, but no alarm.

Six shots were fired by Don Dionicio in regular succession. His expression was that of a mischievous and defiant schoolboy as he chuckled at the result of his game, or whatever it was.

Several other men had come on to the platform—they had correctly left their horses outside—to watch the shooting; amongst them being my little friend in the bad breeches, whose name is Jose Figueroa and who is a contractor for supplying timber and firing-wood to the railway.

Presently the end of the train passed, with the guard, or brakeman, looking very alarmed because of the shooting which he had witnessed. Don Dionicio shouted jovially at him and waved his revolver, obviously relieving the man's anxiety, for he grinned and waved back as he departed to the north.

Directly the train had passed one of Moreno's men crossed the line again and picked up the peach tin and brought it over to where we were all standing.

Excitedly it was examined by everyone, including the station-master.

There were twelve holes through it, made by revolver bullets: six of entry and six of exit.

What Don Dionicio had done was to aim at it in the brief interval between the trucks of the moving train and had hit it with each shot.

Everyone applauded with enthusiasm, except the little man in the breeches, who made an attempt to creep out of the station unnoticed while everyone was congratulating such marksmanship.

But Don Dionicio was watching him. With a shout like a roar from a lion he caused Figueroa to halt in the doorway.

I didn't understand what was said, but it was evident that a great joke was enjoyed. With an amusing air of grievance, little Figueroa appealed to everyone, particularly to me as likely to be an impartial umpire.

His appeals were greeted with derision by everyone and at last, with an injured air, he fished a bundle of notes from his pocket and handed them over to Moreno.

Evidently the shooting had been done for a bet of no mean sum.

Don Dionicio pocketed the notes and laughed still more joyfully. We were all invited to join at the *boliche* to drink at his expense.

Then up spake the little station-master in a shrill squeal and made a demand which caused everyone to laugh again.

He hung on to Moreno's bridle with one hand and pocket with the other.

Only Moreno now looked a little less jovial and slightly perplexed.

Opinion was obviously against him, however, so that he submitted with a good grace, withdrew the bundle of notes he had just pocketed and handed a casual part of them to the station-master, who counted them carefully and appeared quite satisfied. So the loan of the morning was repaid, I suppose.

After that we all trooped across to the *boliche* and made merry.

Such was my introduction to Don Dionicio Moreno. I have met him several times since and the more I see of him the more I like him. He drinks more than is good for him, but never persuades me to have more than I want. At times he is very steady and attends to his business seriously. He is most anxious to be friendly with me and is my most patient teacher of Spanish, whenever he comes this way.

He has invited me to spend a day on his estate shortly, on another of the frequent national holidays.

Evidently he owns a great extent of land and employs many men, in cattle and horse-breeding, hard-wood logging, cutting fence-posts and railway sleepers, charcoal burning and other rural industries.

He receives and despatches quite a quantity of goods from this station, but is apparently a prodigal person who is always in debt. He finds the next station farther down the line—some thirty miles away, I understand—more useful to him. Only when his credit is temporarily exhausted elsewhere does he come to Tacanas for his business. Rather a pity, as he is a man of most interesting character. He has an air of authority

combined with courtesy to everyone, no matter how rich or poor, which is altogether admirable.

I shall be very much interested to see what sort of home he has in the forest.

DESERT LIFE—NOT SO GAY

No. 8

Tacanas

I NOW get my meals in the queerest hotel imaginable. Occasionally a drummer comes this way, hires a horse or a mule, and goes away towards the forest land with his samples in saddle-bags.

I discovered that one of the thatched shacks provides beds for, and its owner hires horses or mules to, these commercial gents, and that he would cater for me if I liked.

I interviewed him. By the aid of a dictionary and pantomime we came to an understanding. I have bread and coffee for breakfast (those who haven't tried coffee, made with goat's milk instead of water, in the air of the prairie at daybreak have never completely lived). The bread is rather like biscuit, but quite good.

For lunch I have all sorts of queer dishes of goat-flesh, fowl, beef and, best of all, a sort of national dish called *puchero*, which is made from stewed marrow-bones with the meat on and with mealies and other native vegetables cooked with it. A sort of Irish stew, only much better. For dinner I have excellent soup, an omelette or poached eggs, and cheese.

For all this I pay the equivalent of about ten shillings a week!

Did I tell you that there are any number of goats about here? They seem to flourish on almost nothing in the way of pasture. They wander off in flocks in the mornings, led by an old one with a bell round its neck, and come back each evening to be milked. They nibble the tufts of dry grass and the dead-looking twigs of little bushes. I haven't seen them touch a cactus plant.

There are also heaps of fowls; some of them just like vultures with long naked necks. It is not a moult, but a particular breed of bird, horrible to look at, but quite good to eat.

Our beef comes from the forest and is brought in two or three times a week. Much of it is cut into thin strips, and hung to dry in the sun, where it stays for a day or two smothered with flies, but is really quite good eating when cooked by local methods.

I find that I can get excellent butter from the train dining-car, so am doing well.

I miss tea—which no one drinks here—and bacon. Otherwise all is well.

The owner of the "hotel" is a queer, fat little man with all the air of the manager of a big fashionable place in London. Obsequious to his guests and hectoring to his subordinates—the latter in this case being two or three old half-breed women and a couple of dirty little children.

The place has only earth floors. The walls are made of mud bricks, with no attempt to plaster the inside. The roof is a crude thatch of maize straw on branches of trees. The floor is well watered and swept and has become very solid and almost polished by wear. The tables and chairs are little rusty iron affairs, but the table linen is clean.

There are no proper rooms; only a square of wall about as big as a tennis court, with the thatched roof sloping in towards an open space in the centre. One side of the square is occupied by the cooking arrangements, one side by the dining tables and the other two are divided by rough wattle partitions into sleeping quarters. They look rather like crude stalls in a cattle market.

Ablutions are performed at a tub of water in the kitchen part of the square. Sanitation is provided anywhere outside amongst the cactus plants and scrub, where nature has provided a vast number of scavenger beetles who have nothing to learn from the finest system of sewers.

Incidentally I should tell you that the only water supply for the whole of this settlement is a well by the station. Every household must carry all its water from there and it entails quite a lot of labour.

I find that there are a number of little shacks scattered about amongst the cactus and shrivelled little trees on the east side of the railway. They seem to have been erected promiscuously anywhere and are the shabbiest little huts imaginable, often nothing more than a crude thatch on four uprights, open to all the winds that blow.

Some of the people who live in such poor homes have a peculiar dignity of bearing and a lordly courtesy of manner which is altogether surprising. There is, of course, a good deal of Indian mixed with their Spanish blood. One cannot help feeling that many of these very poor people are descended from good stock amongst the earlier Spanish settlers. Of course, they are not all of a good type. Some of them are dirty, cringing little creatures, such as one would expect to find living in such hovels. The strange thing is that any of them should be otherwise.

I made an arrangement with the owner of the hotel, or *fonda* as they call it, that I should sleep as well as eat in his establishment. His beds looked more comfortable than the one in my room at the station; having beautifully clean sheets, whereas my bed has none at all.

I only slept in that hotel one night. I was awakened by a sharp pain in my neck. Putting my hand to the spot, I caught hold of a struggling creature that felt like a cockroach and flung it away.

A moment later another stab of pain in my middle made me decide to light a candle and investigate. I found no less than eight huge bugs in my bed. Dirty brown creatures, like elongated bed-bugs, an inch long, with queer little legs sticking out all round them and smelling abominably.

It was more than I could endure. I got up, dressed, and spent the rest of the night wandering about the moonlit desert. The grotesque shapes of the cactus and their shadows were frightening after an hour or so. They became ghosts, with distorted arms outstretched, who seemed to move as I moved.

However, I came here to find the romance of the wild, so I couldn't run away from cactus and moonlight, but was glad enough when day came.

A STRANGE VISION: LOVE BY HELIOGRAPH

No. 9

Tacanas

JUST before sunrise this morning I saw the most wonderful sight I have ever seen. I am doubtful if I shall be able to give you any impression of the beauty of the moment.

I must tell you, first of all, that, during the six weeks I have been in this country, I have never seen even the tiniest cloud in the sky. Nothing but a blazing blue, day after day. Apparently for the six winter months of each year there is never a cloud to be seen.

This morning, at daybreak, I was standing in the road outside the *fonda* drinking a cup of coffee. The fat little proprietor was with me and we were waiting to see the sun come up over the edge of the desert. It is always a fine sight, as it comes up like a big smoky ball of fire and lights the haze or mist of the desert until the whole air seems to be on fire, like a Turner painting.

I happened to turn my face to the west for a moment and there, high in the sky, was a line of rose-pink cloud. Ragged along its upper edge and peculiarly definite in outline, its lower edge was a vague straight line. Below was nothing but the clear blue sky.

I had never before seen a cloud like it and, having been told that clouds were never seen during these winter months, I was more than surprised. So much so that I called the attention of the innkeeper to the sight.

He turned and looked at it unconcernedly.

"*Si, Señor,*" he remarked quietly, "*la Cordillera.*" (He pronounced it "Cordyaira").

That meant nothing to me, though it sounded a beautiful name for a beautiful line of pink cloud.

I was too enthralled to ask then for an interpretation of his remark. Perhaps I unconsciously realized that what I saw was not cloud. I continued to gaze, and as I gazed the sun came up behind me and in the same moment that line of cloud faded from the sky.

It did not dissolve, it just went. The whole sky was once more the blazing, brilliant blue of day, except for the Turneresque haze to the east where the sun had risen.

"What did you say that was?" I asked of my companion.

"*La Cordillera, Señor.* The summit of the mountains. The Andes. Very beautiful, no?" They always put that interrogative negative when they make statements, these polite people.

Now I thought, I had seen the Andes from my prison window in Tucuman, and I had been sufficiently impressed by their mighty grandeur and remote eternity. What I had just seen was something incredibly more awe-inspiring. It was as though I had looked at a fragment of another planet, so high in the heavens, so utterly inaccessible and far beyond the reach of mere human beings did those rose-pink summits seem.

I realized then that the ranges I had seen with such reverential awe from my prison window were but foot-hills of the mighty giants so far beyond and above that only rarely were their summits seen by the eyes of man.

I felt more like understanding what is meant by the Fear of God in those few moments this morning than I have ever done.

I am going there soon. It is as though God unvciled His greatest jewel to me for a brief second or two this morning to show me where my future lies. I shall perhaps never reach those eternal snows, but I shall climb and climb towards them and shall for ever hope to see them again in their morning blush.

Now I must break the news that I am in love.

In my last letter I think I told you of the many little shacks which exist amongst the clumps of cactus and dead-looking trees of this desert land. *Ranchos* they are called, but that has, apparently, no connection with the American word ranch.

In one of these *ranchos*, one of the poorest of them, lives a tall and stately old man. He is gaunt and grim, and very straight and lean. He has fierce eyes under grey level brows and a big moustache brushed away from the hard line of his lips, and a little pointed beard.

He wears a wide-brimmed *sombrero*, a *poncho* swathed over his broad shoulders like a Highlander's plaid, and wide trousers tucked into tall riding boots on which are gigantic iron spurs,

with rowels three inches in diameter which ring like bells as the old man moves.

I have never seen such a picture of austere dignity as he makes. His every movement and gesture is haughty, as though he were a king instead of something very near a beggar.

He makes me think of the stories of the Spanish dons of Elizabethan times, when they were the conquerors of half the earth. I feel sure this man must be descended from some ancient family of old Castille, but, as he can neither read nor write and has probably never had a book in his hand, it is certain that he is as ignorant of his possible ancestry as I am sure of it.

He gets occasional employment as a guide to travellers who have to make long journeys into the uncharted country of this area. He does other little jobs, such as superintending the loading of cattle and logs and similar work.

Evidently he would rather be as miserably poor as he is now, than bend his pride to any sort of manual labour.

Now this old fellow has a daughter. Perhaps because young women in this place are as scarce as strawberries in December, this girl seems to me the most beautiful creature I have ever seen.

Anyhow, it pleases me to believe that I am the only Englishman who has seen the most beautiful girl in the world, and I shan't debate the subject, even with myself.

She is as straight and haughty as her father, and with every bit of his aristocratic bearing. To see her walking across the desert with her sandalled feet treading the dusty earth, with an earthenware pitcher on her head, is to have seen something worth living for.

Her skin is the colour of milky cocoa. Her hair is brown and wavy and hangs in a heavy plait. She wears a queer little short bodice, which, as she lifts an arm to steady the pitcher on her head, rises to expose the roundest bosom.

Her skirt seems to be merely a length of coloured cotton material wrapped round her waist like a kilt and tied there with a ribbon.

Those two garments and her sandals comprise her whole wardrobe apparently.

But her eyes are all that really matter. They are eyes which



... WALKING ACROSS THE DESERT ... WITH AN
EARTHENWARE PITCHER ON HER HEAD

I find very difficult to look at, so straight and penetrating, so candid and calm is their gaze. They never smile. They remind me of the eyes of a lion in a zoo, seeming to gaze unblinkingly at you, and through you, and beyond you.

But this girl's eyes are not black like most animals', but glowing with soft flames of many colours; sometimes blue, sometimes green, sometimes almost red. One just stares at them and wonders what thoughts could possibly lie behind them.

Only once have I feebly attempted to speak to this strange creature. I had watched her come to the well at about the same hour each morning, so one day I seated myself at the well-head and waited while she approached. I put on my best grin and mumbled some words about the labour of water-carrying.

Until that moment I had not looked into her eyes. When I did so I became as dumb as if I had no tongue.

She did not say a word in reply. She neither smiled nor looked annoyed. She just looked at me, and through me, with an intent and steady gaze as she waited for me to move from my place on the well-head so that she could draw water.

She also might have been deaf and dumb for all the notice she took of my words.

I was just mesmerized. I felt thoroughly abashed and squashed. Instead of being a decently-bred Englishman patronizing a poor peasant-girl, I felt like a minion bowing himself out of the presence of a queen as I got down from my place and made off.

All very strange. It has left me very much in love; or with a desire to conquer and possess, which I suppose is a great part of being in love. This girl is altogether too proud in manner to rouse thoughts of the gentler side of love in any man. There never was a woman who seemed to be less in need of protection or help.

If she were rich and powerful all men would bow before her and beg her favours, but no man would be such a fool as to think of shielding her as a weak woman. She upsets all one's conceptions of chivalry.

Being what she is, a half-savage daughter of a beggarly peasant; unable to read or write; knowing no world except

this dead and barren land of cactus and spiders, and lizards and snakes, and the skeletons of starved cattle, it is all wrong that she should be able to make me, a presumably educated, and certainly civilized, young man, feel ridiculous just because she looks at me.

I can't bear it; I intend to make her love me and surrender that proud spirit.

I have seen her talk and laugh with other women, showing perfect teeth and a sweet smile. Why, then, should she stare at me as if I scarcely existed?

Well, that's how I feel. Furiously in love; or ravenously hungry for something which is beyond my reach; whichever you like.

I spend a lot of time thinking of how one might take such a beautiful creature away from these surroundings and watch her as she encountered all the wonders of civilization. How one might have her educated and watch the extraordinary soul which must lie behind those eyes develop into something stranger and more wonderful than imagination can picture.

Alas, the only progress I have made so far in the matter is by heliograph. I am not going to allow myself to be humiliated again by attempting to speak to her. I can't write to her, since she can't read, and I don't even know her name—and hang it all, one doesn't write to half-dressed savages, does one?

So I am reduced to the heliograph, which means that every morning as she makes her graceful way across the desert towards the well, I take my shaving mirror and stand in the door of my room and flash the reflection of the sun into her eyes.

Not much satisfaction in that, you say.

You are quite right; none at all, except that it does convey to her the fact that I am aware of her every morning, and at least I am far enough away to be unable to see the terrible indifference in those lovely eyes.

Up to the present she has shown no sign of being aware that I am flashing the mirror at her. She has not as much as raised a hand to shield her eyes. One day she will get a particularly strong flash and then she will be compelled at least to turn her head. And that, I'm afraid, is the best I can hope for from my strange wooing.

Sad, isn't it?

VERY GAY LIFE IN THE DESERT

No. 10

Tacasas

IMPOSSIBLE to believe that there could be so much of interest and excitement in this desert.

Last week I spent a day at the home of Dionicio Moreno, and had a wonderful time. It was another saint's day or national holiday of some sort. They seem to have one every three weeks or so here.

He sent a trio of cowboys to guide me, and one of his best horses for me to ride.

I had nothing to wear except white polo breeches and my polo boots which, though an excellent fit, look very strange beside the wide trousers and great rough boots these local men wear. Stranger still were my spurs. The local kind look like some sort of agricultural instrument and weight about a couple of pounds each, with rowels as big as the palm of one's hand.

My neat little hunting spurs, when I put them on, seemed quite ridiculously small and ineffective. In fact, my whole riding outfit made me feel rather like a girl caught out in her underclothes, beside these rough cattle men in their picturesque, but very serviceable, gear.

I could see a suppressed smile in their eyes as they looked me over.

Fortunately I made no mistake about mounting my horse. Some of the local saddles are the queerest affairs. A mass of folded blankets and sheepskins; for the reason that each man's saddle is also his bed on the frequent occasions when he is obliged to sleep out.

My first mistake was when I discovered that my horse would not obey the reins. In fact, it did exactly the opposite to what I wanted it to do. For a few moments I was quite defeated and felt ridiculous. Then I found out the reason. It is the custom of this country never to ride on the bit or steer by it as we do.

Merely by laying the rein against the neck is a horse turned

away from that rein. I was turning my hand to put pressure on the bit, with the result that I was touching the animals' neck with the tighter rein and causing it to turn away from and not towards it.

The bits used are as apparently cruel as the spurs, but neither the one nor the other is really used. The fact that a horse knows that his rider could almost break its jaw with the bit or cut its flanks with the spurs has a sort of moral effect which is quite sufficient.

When I started pulling at the bit to guide my horse it obviously resented such unusual treatment and was both angry and frightened, and so was I when it wouldn't do as I wished. Fortunately for my dignity, already at a low ebb because of my "lingerie," we soon came to an understanding and forgave each other.

I cannot understand why anyone ever steers a horse by any other method than touching its neck with the reins. It is so delightfully simple and the fact that the horse knows it has the great cruel bit in its mouth prevents any nonsense about boring or bolting. The slightest tension on the reins is enough to pull it up dead.

Obviously one needs to develop good hands, or risk all sorts of contretemps. No hanging on by the reins at jumps and tricks of that sort, or one would soon have the horse over backwards on top of one, as I nearly did at first.

Having come to terms about such things, we set off at a canter for Dionicio Moreno's house, about twelve miles away. The first four or five miles were through cactus desert, then we came to scattered trees and were very soon in low forest country, with quite a lot of good grass in the open glades.

My companions pointed out the different kinds of trees and explained their value for various purposes.

Then we came upon a small herd of cattle. Quite useful-looking animals of nondescript breed, all with a brand on their flanks, which I was told was Don Dionico's registered mark. I had noticed the same brand on his horses. Apparently each owner has his own brand, which is registered with the authorities somewhere, so that there can be no dispute about ownership: very necessary in this unfenced country.

Some horses have several brands on their flanks, showing that they have changed hands. I suppose each transaction has to be recorded, but how it is done with such illiterate people as these I have yet to find out.

The flies and mosquitoes were very thick in the forest and, as usual, they attacked new blood and settled on me in a cloud while ignoring my companions. I wasn't sorry when we presently emerged on a wide clearing and saw a pleasant one-storied, whitewashed, tile-roofed house before us, and saw Don Dionicio on the wide veranda awaiting us.

Goats, pigs, fowls, ducks, turkeys, calves and colts all wandered in and out of the house and outbuildings in the jolliest good fellowship.

The veranda and all the rooms are on ground level. Every door was wide open. There are no windows; only double-jalousied doors to each room. The veranda goes right round the house and was littered with saddles and harness, guns, *lazos*, sacks of corn, spades and a hundred other such things.

Don Dionicio beamed and shouted his pleasure at welcoming me at his home. He called to his wife to come and meet me. From somewhere at the back of the house emerged a portly and smiling matron, who curtsied and bade me welcome, and in turn called out commands.

Appeared three or four maidens, to whom I was introduced, but whether Moreno's daughters or what they were, I didn't know. They all had on their Sunday-best and looked very attractive in white lace bodices, without sleeves, and bright-coloured skirts, and with gay ribbons around their dark hair.

Drinks were produced immediately and everyone had to join in drinking my health.

Then we mounted our horses again and set off for a ride through the forest, where Don Dionicio showed me with pride his many interests and industries. Stacks of logs, and railway sleepers, fence-posts, fire-logs for the railway. Herds of cattle, mules and horses. Most interesting of all was a charcoal burner's camp. Apparently there is a big demand for charcoal in Buenos Aires, where it is used in braziers in lieu of coal in grates.

The charcoal burners are mostly old men and look like full-blooded Indians. There is a great art in their job and it needs much skill.

With logs about three feet long and six to ten inches thick, they build stacks about fifteen feet high and the same diameter and hollow in the middle; which needs skilful stacking. When complete, the whole mound is covered with a layer of moist soil about a foot thick—there is always moisture in the forest, in fact a lot of land is swamp—which is well beaten down with spades. A small aperture is left in the top.

A small entrance to the hollow core of the stack is left at ground level, just big enough for a man to crawl in. By means of this hole a fire is laid and lit inside the stack and the draught regulated by closing the hole with turf.

By skilful management the logs inside the stack are allowed to smoulder gently until they become charcoal. It requires ceaseless watching, or the whole thing would burst into flame and become ashes instead of valuable charcoal.

It takes several weeks for one of these big stacks to burn, I believe. Then the carbonized logs are broken up into convenient-sized lumps, put into sacks and sent to the railway. It is a very profitable industry.

We returned to the house for lunch about mid-day.

And what a lunch. Soup, the inevitable marrow-bone stew called *puchero*, boiled fowls, a whole sucking-pig roasted over an open fire, sweet corn on the cob, which one eats like playing a mouth-organ. Then water melon and delicious grapes; all washed down with great tankards of native wine and followed by coffee and brandy.

Difficult to believe that I ate some of every one of those things. There was nothing else to be done. Don Dionicio and his wife looked as if they would die of grief if I didn't have a helping of everything. So I loosened my belt, muttered a silent prayer and set to.

We ate solidly for an hour, with the girls of the household waiting on us, and Señora Moreno superintending the feast.

She didn't eat with us. Apparently the husband is very much of a feudal lord on these country estates and his wife is not expected to sit at the same table with him and his guests.

Dionicio was very kind in his manner to her, even affectionate, but in a patronizing sort of way.

She seemed quite content, even anxious, to do nothing except attend to his wants.

Everyone about the establishment, and there were numerous families living in huts round the central house, was obviously ready and willing to obey the slightest gesture from their master. No sign of fear of him; only a willing and happy service. Most interesting to witness; so unlike anything I have seen elsewhere.

After lunch we lit cigars and rested our bloated bodies in rocking-chairs.

When we had finished our cigars, I was shown a room where I should enjoy the siesta which is the universal custom from about one o'clock till three. The jalousied doors had been closed, admitting a cool green light. The tiled floor had been sprinkled with water to cool the air.

I was asleep in a moment and was surprised to know that it was three o'clock when I heard Don Dionicio yawn like a roaring lion on the veranda outside my room. Then his great laugh and hearty voice woke everyone. Orders were passed from place to place, horses were saddled, and all the sounds of holiday activity enlivened the afternoon.

"Are you awake, Don Juan?" shouted my host. "*Vamos!* I am going to show you how our people enjoy themselves on a feast day."

I rose at once, pulled on my boots, buckled my foolish little spurs and joined him on the veranda.

I was surprised to see the change in the appearance of everyone. The men had all put on clean linen clothes. Short jackets, wide trousers tucked into riding-boots, gay sashes round their waists, coloured scarves round their necks.

Every man had brought out his best saddle and bridle, heavily silver mounted, and each had donned silver spurs with silver buckles, and carried a short whip, also heavy with silver. Through their sashes were stuck long knives with silver hilts. Some even had silver-mounted chin-straps to their hats.

It all sounds rather too decorative and effeminate, but the lithe energy of these men and their tough, weather-beaten faces,

with the gleam of almost truculent courage in their eyes, made them look anything but effeminate. Rather they looked like mediæval knights, and it gave one a slight sense of awe to watch them mount their horses and to see their superb seats in the saddle as they showed off the paces of their animals and chaffed each other boyishly.

While I waited for Don Dionicio and a man held my horse, Señora Moreno chatted to me on the veranda.

You can imagine my surprise when she told me with pride that all the dozen or so *gauchos* who were waiting to accompany us and the dozen or more girls and boys who stood about looking on, were all the children of her husband.

"Alas, I have never given him a son. Only the three daughters you saw at lunch. Yet he never reproaches me for it. He is a splendid man, don't you think, Señor?"

I didn't know what to think. I was quite sure that she was a splendid woman, to point with such pride to her husband's many illegitimate children and show no sign of jealousy.

Queer difference of moral outlook to our own and eminently practical; for here one saw that all the requisite labour for a flourishing estate was provided by the master's offspring.

Whether he pays them any regular wage or not, I don't know. There was every sign of loyal affection and unquestioning obedience to the Patron's wishes. (They all call him "Patron.") Evidently a simple solution of labour problems; a man might almost breed his own army if necessary.

Queer idea, isn't it?

Having said good-bye to Señora Moreno and promised to come again, I mounted my horse as Don Dionicio came out of his room.

He was resplendent in new clothes and silver fittings, and looked a real chieftain with his hearty, swaggering bearing. His coat was of European cut and he wore collar and a loose neck-tie, otherwise he was dressed like his men.

He had a big revolver in his wide leather belt, as well as his long knife.

His horse was a magnificent roan, and so restive that I was interested to see how a heavy man like Don Dionicio would mount it.

"All ready, boys?" he shouted as he took the reins.

"Ay, Patron," they all replied gaily.

Without any effort he lifted his foot to the stirrup, the horse moved forward impatiently and Don Dionicio seemed to slide up into the saddle by some invisible power. There is something very fascinating in the way these born horsemen ride. There is such an ease and grace about it all; complete unity of horse and rider which can only exist in a people who spend all their lives in the saddle.

Don Dionicio beckoned me to ride beside him and we set off, with his troop of sons following close behind. Spurs and bridles clattered musically with their weight of silver fittings as we cantered along a dusty track through the sparse trees at the edge of the forest. I was reminded of a picture I had once seen of a band of Moss Troopers and felt we looked no less picturesque.

I was more than ever conscious of my polo breeches and boots and spurs, which must have looked very naked and inadequate.

After about three miles we came to a small settlement of a dozen or so houses, or shacks, where there was a scene of tremendous gaiety.

A hundred or more horses were tethered to the fence of a corral. Their riders had apparently arrived in the morning, as the festivities were in full swing and many men had already drunk more than they could properly manage.

A big barn sort of place was being used as a saloon. Many barrels of wine and dozens of cases of beer and square-faced gin were being broached at high speed.

Many men had brought their women and were dancing with them to the music of two or three guitars, an accordion, and a fiddle.

They danced in the dust of an open space in front of the barn and were entralling to watch. There is a favourite sort of national dance here called *El Tango*. The music for it is very peculiar, with a sort of dual rhythm, half sad and sentimental, and half a sort of defiant march time.

The steps are most interesting and very graceful as performed by these tall *gauchos*. The women seem to surrender themselves



THEY DANCED IN THE DUST OF AN OPEN SPACE
IN FRONT OF THE BARN

completely and are just swayed and flung about by the men. Yet one knows that it is all part of a skilled performance.

There are places in the dance where the men stamp their feet, and make their great spurs ring and jangle in time with the music with a queer, defiant sort of gesture.

The music of *El Tango* is hauntingly appropriate to the lives of these people. The melancholy air seems to tell of the hardships of their lives in this wilderness, and the march time which blends with it represents the courage and hope of their struggle towards a better future.

There is another popular dance which is interesting. I don't know what they call it. Two men and two women form a group and by their steps and movements tell a story of love and jealousy and revenge and final reconciliation. All very cleverly done, and again the big spurs are made to play their part in the movement of strife between the men, very effectively.

Don Dionicio, who had been welcomed by everyone with enthusiasm, introduced me to many people, who courteously refrained from looking at my legs—one or two drunken *peons*, staring unbelievably at them, managed to restrain their comments.

We pushed our way through the throng about the bar and drank each other's health; then I was taken round to see the other amusements.

An excited crowd stood watching a game of throwing an ox's knuckle-bone.

It is only thrown a distance of some fifteen or twenty feet, and as far as I could see requires little skill, and is entirely a betting game as to whether the bone lands in the soft dust flat or hollow side uppermost. Judging by the enthusiasm and the amount of money changing hands, there must be a lot more in the game than I could see.

Don Dionicio had a bet or two, but did not throw the bone. He seemed to enjoy watching, though he lost his money. The game is called *taba*.

Next he led me out behind the crowd to where horses were being raced. No organized race meeting this, but just challenges of one horse against another for a stake.

The riders discarded saddles and their boots, spurs and jackets.

Some even dispensed with bridles and, instead, tied a light thong of raw-hide round their horse's lower jaw, with the ends as reins.

Each race was over a straight course of about a quarter of a mile and the bets decided by the best of three races.

Here also the betting was heavy, though the handfuls of paper currency which changed ownership might have been much or little in value. One can't tell with this rubbishy paper money.

Then, to what was evidently the greatest attraction. We pushed through a tight crowd of men and women, who rather grudgingly yielded place before Don Dionicio's cheerful but commanding voice, until we found ourselves by the side of a shallow pit about fifteen feet wide.

In this pit was something which I thought had been abolished for a century or more: nothing less than a fight between game-cocks, armed with steel spurs and with their wings and tails trimmed, just as one sees in old prints in England.

A main was just about to start as we took our places. Each cock was held by its owner, who seemed to tremble and quiver with an exaggerated excitement, as though to impart energy and the joy of battle to the bird he held.

Here there seemed to be some kind of organized betting, for two men held out hats into which money was placed for each bird, with a great deal of shouting of odds and the names of the betters and the amount of their bets.

All very exciting, as cheers greeted each bet of large amount and the odds kept changing from one bird to the other. No sign of any sort of book-making; not as much as a pencil or bit of paper anywhere; nothing but memory and men's faith in each other could settle the accounts at the end of the match.

Very bewildering to me, and I anticipated a much more serious cock-fight when the birds had settled their affair and the men attempted to settle their bets.

When it appeared that all the backers were satisfied, a man who acted as judge gave the order for the fight to start. The holders of the two cocks moved closer together in the ring. Squatting down, they held their birds just out of reach of each other and let them see each other at close quarters, meanwhile making the strangest little guttural noises of encouragement.

At a sign from the judge the birds were released and the two men hurriedly stepped out of the pit.

The actual fight was disappointing as a spectacle, though its end was extremely interesting. The movements of the birds when actually in combat were far too rapid for human eyes to follow; or my unaccustomed eyes, anyhow.

The cocks, with heads and necks low and outstretched towards each other, circled round for a moment; then there was a jumble of feathers in the air and the rasping sound of wings for a brief second and once more the circling movement. Then another instant flash in the air and again more circling.

It was quite impossible to see any blows struck. One only saw the two birds meet in the air and heard the rasp of their impact.

The only way I could tell which bird was winning was by the amount of blood on their heads and necks after each impact. As both birds were equally bloody, I was surprised to find, by the shouts and excitement of the onlookers, that they thought the black cock was beating the red one.

After the fourth brief impact in the air, the red bird showed definite signs of distress. It staggered slightly as it resumed the circling manœuvre, but obviously had no intention of quitting.

Another instantaneous leap and flash, and the black bird fell to the ground in a heap, struggled to rise, then fell over on its side and was dead.

The red bird, still with neck outstretched, circled round it rather drunkenly for a moment, then put its bloody head up and, stretching up to its fullest height, emitted a loud cock-a-doodle-do, which sounded extremely brave and defiant; then suddenly collapsed and fell as dead as its opponent!

The uproar amongst the onlookers was terrific when they saw this unexpected end.

Not the usual end of a cock-fight, I was told. Usually one bird dies, but not both. These were two champions who had been matched for large sums, and they had apparently given good value, if one could judge by the applause.

What struck me as most strange, was the callous indifference of the owners of the birds about the corpses of their brave champions. As soon as the fight was over the pit was invaded

by everyone who had a bet on. The dead birds were just kicked aside in the scramble for money from the men who held the stakes. I was glad to back away out of the crowd. I never wish to see another cock-fight.

We went then to watch the dancing. Naphtha flares were being lit outside the saloon as night was near.

Many more people were arriving, all on horseback and often with a young woman behind her man's saddle.

A long night's dancing was obviously intended.

At various little open fires round about men and women were cooking: great ribs of beef, from which pieces were cut with the long knives every man carries, then eaten with the fingers. No bread, no salt, no vegetables; nothing except bits of roast beef to make a meal.

Payment for such fare seemed to be very casual. A few nickel coins or a shabby little paper note were dropped on to the ground near the man or woman in charge of the cooking, but no one seemed to pay particular attention to the amount.

At other fires little meat patties were being baked and sold. I tried one and found it delicious. Good pastry, with a mixture of meat, onion, potato and raisins inside. Very like a Cornish pasty—except for the raisins.

The saloon did a fine trade in tinned tongues and salmon and sardines, also all sorts of tinned fruits. These people are very fond of tinned food, but only eat them as a treat on days of fiesta.

As night came the air of gaiety was rather spoiled by angry quarrels amongst some of the men who had been drinking too much.

The racing, cock-fighting and *taba* having ended with the daylight, there was only dancing and drinking left as entertainment. Everybody did both. Even I tried to dance, but with little success. Dust several inches deep is not an ideal floor on which to try strange dances. My efforts were applauded and the natives seemed to think I was being very friendly in trying. The girls I chose as partners were most kind and patient and tried to teach me the steps.

In the midst of one such attempt a sudden excitement broke out. A great noise of angry shouting, the cries of frightened

women and then, beyond a throng of people, I heard the ringing of knives in conflict.

My partner, young and adventurous, dragged me by the arm and struggled a passage for us through the crowd until we could see what was happening.

Outside the saloon place, in the light of the flares, two men were engaged in a fierce fight with their long knives. The onlookers had formed a ring and obviously intended to enjoy the spectacle.

The combatants had discarded their jackets and, by the look on their faces, were intent on killing each other.

The knives all these men carry are not daggers, but long, broad-bladed carving-knife affairs. They are used for innumerable purposes: chopping wood, opening tins, killing and skinning animals, picking teeth, hacking a path through the bush, cutting wire, cleaning finger-nails and even cutting hair. Also they are used for settling all serious quarrels.

I saw that these men fighting made no attempt to stab with them, but slashed at each other. Their skill was wonderful. They leapt round each other at lightning speed, while their big knives rang incessantly as each blow was struck and parried.

I was quite hypnotized by the excitement of watching such skill in what I imagined was a fight to the death.

My companion was equally thrilled. She held my arm and clutched it violently at each apparent advantage in the fight. In a suppressed but fervent voice she muttered encouragement to the man she favoured.

I felt considerably alarmed lest some fellow who might be fond of my partner would notice the way she was clinging to my arm and, becoming jealous, challenge me to a similar battle.

But it was all too exciting for such thoughts to trouble me seriously. The fight went on for several minutes without advantage to either side. Suddenly one man was seen to be bleeding from a cut on the cheek and a shout went up from the onlookers. The pace of the battle increased; the ringing of the blades and the clanging of the great spurs the fighters wore made strange, angry music. Their breath came in hoarse gasps in time with each slash they made.

Suddenly the wounded man's knife flew into the air. He clutched his wrist with the other hand and stepped back and away from his opponent as a stream of blood poured through his fingers. The conqueror calmly looked on for a moment then bent and wiped the blade of his knife in the soft dust at his feet and quietly replaced it in its scabbard.

The victim was taken charge of by friends, who quickly bound up his wrist and led him away.

The crowd, obviously very accustomed to such affairs, broke up and drifted back to their dancing and drinking.

I bumped against Don Dionicio a few moments later and asked if he had seen the fight.

"Why, yes, Don Juan, of course. We shall see many more presently. There are a lot of men here who have quarrels to settle. Good men with their knives, too, not just beginners like those two youngsters."

That sounded pretty serious to me. Moreno had been drinking hard since I had last seen him and was far from sober, so I hoped he was exaggerating.

I didn't like the idea of witnessing many more such combats. Altogether too deadly for my taste.

I remembered how many of the cattle-men and lumber-men had large scars on their faces and realized now that they must be wounds received in knife fights. I began to wish that I could get away and go home, but realized that without a guide I should be quite lost. I daren't show my weakness by asking Don Dionicio to send a man with me while the night's fun was only half spent.

I was thinking these thoughts while Moreno was dragging me to the saloon to drink with him. He had got beyond the stage of consideration for my abstemious habits and was just determined that I should do my best to get as drunk as he was. I regret to say that I eventually did.

A fellow with a fine baritone voice and a guitar, which he played well, sang a lot of songs. They all had very much the same air and time as *El Tango*, and there was an indescribable blending of pathos and courage in each song. I noticed that the singer—a tough-looking *gaucho*, with nothing soft or musical in his appearance—improvised the words of all his songs.

As so many Spanish words end in "o," it was easy for him to make rhyme and rhythm.

I was watching him with interest and not paying particular attention to his words, when I noticed that everyone was looking at me and smiling.

I then discovered that this singer, a sort of troubadour fellow, I suppose, was singing about me. His words were kindly and were a sort of welcome to a young traveller in a strange land, and said that everyone appreciated the way I had joined in their holiday spirit.

I was very much flattered by such attention and paid for drinks all round to show my gratitude. I sang all sorts of strange songs in chorus with the many friends who gathered round Moreno, and was quite unconcerned when, later on, I realized that other knife fights were going on behind me, and that none of my companions was sufficiently interested to turn his head or to interrupt his song to watch.

I vaguely remember riding back to Tacanas through a flood of moonlight, with Moreno and half a dozen other men beside me, all singing loudly. When I awoke I was on one of the beds at the *fonda*. The sun was well up. The *benchucas*, which is the name for the giant bed-bugs which live in thatch, had feasted and raised several bumps on me and retired to their holes with the coming of the day. Don Dionicio was snoring on the bed beside me and I was rather disgusted to see that he still had his boots and spurs on. Then I looked at my own feet and saw that I had also!

COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE

No. II

Tacanas

WELL, I am not to be a railway magnate. I have resigned my job once more and am going into business on my own; or in partnership, anyhow.

Yes, I can hear you saying that it is the same old story. Rolling stone. Ne'er-do-well, and so forth. Perhaps you are right, but when you hear that the Railway Company is encouraging my newest enterprise—not because it loves me, but because it will bring traffic to the Company—you may think better of me.

Which reminds me that I have never told you anything about my work on the station.

It is easily told. Nominally the station staff consists of the *Gefe*, pronounced "Heffy" (station-master), an assistant (myself), a telegraphist, and a porter or general labourer (*peon* is the word for a labourer here). Actually there is seldom anyone except the *Gefe* and myself. Telegraphists are very scarce. Two have come since I have been here, but have found the place too uncivilized and have left within a week. They are a bumptious class of young men, who think themselves very cultured and live only for town life.

The *peon* is paid for out of the station-master's allowances, so that he is seldom employed; only if there happens to be a particularly big amount of traffic.

Therefore the *Gefe* and I do all the work. He handles the telegraph instrument and goods traffic. I sell all tickets (never more than six in a day and often none at all), work the signals, clean and fill the oil lamps, and work the switch points on the occasions when a train has to shunt trucks on to our siding.

My work never occupies me more than an hour or two in a day, so I can't be accused of laziness for quitting such a job.

A fortnight ago the *Gefe*, whose name is Martinez, told me a long story about the amount of trade and traffic which would come to Tacanas if only there were a proper general store where people could buy their supplies. He asked me if I had any experience of business. I told him that I had been employed by a big commercial firm in London. That seemed to impress him. London is a magic word to these people. They perhaps don't know that it probably contains more useless people than any other city.

Martinez proceeded to explain that he was too good to be a station-master all his life and that he felt that it would be a grand opportunity to open a general store in Tacanas. I, with

my experience of commerce in the great city of London, was just the partner he had been waiting for. Would I join him?

"But what about the Railway Company? We can't both throw up our jobs and let them down."

"That is easily settled," he answered. "I have already written to them suggesting that you and I start this business here and they agree that it will do a lot to develop trade in the district. They can get people to take our places very easily and will gladly release us."

The problem of capital for such a venture was worrying me. It seemed all wrong to tell Martinez that I, from London of all places, had no capital. He saved me from trouble by explaining that we could rent the biggest house in Tacanas, which has been empty all the time I have been here, for a very nominal figure, convert it into a shop by constructing a lot of shelves from planks which are already in a shed at the back.

"But how about stock?" I asked.

"That is very easy. You will go to Tucuman and see the wholesale firms and they will let you have everything you require. What we don't sell they will take back, so that we shall not require any capital."

I smelt a rat; many rats. It looked as if I was to pledge my credit, while Martinez shared only the profit.

"But it would surely be better if you went to the wholesaler instead of me. I don't speak the language well enough to deal with such a big business affair."

"Not at all, amigo. You are English and they will trust you much more than they will one of their own countrymen. You put on your good London clothes and they will give you credit for any amount you like."

It occurred to me that this faith in Englishmen wasn't very well founded and I suspected that it was part of the trick to catch me.

"How about the name of our new business?" I asked, wondering if I should be buying all the goods in my name only. "I am not sure if my family would like my name to appear over a retail shop door."

That was very cute, I thought. It not only gave me an excuse for avoiding sole liability, but made me appear to be one

of a most superior family. Martinez was duly impressed. He is a complete little snob and quite understood how my family might feel—which is more than I did; or you will when you read this.

The result is that we are now in partnership under the name of Martinez and Company. I have been to Tucuman—in my best suit—and have bought three hundred pounds' worth of goods. Groceries, liquor, boots and shoes, ironmongery, cutlery, etc., without a pennyworth of cash, banker's reference or any other such formality. Solely my word as an Englishman and the cut of my clothes!

I saw the traffic manager, who was most kind and released me from my job with his blessing on our venture.

We spend all our spare time erecting shelves and counter and arranging our merchandise.

The store consists of a large room—about forty feet long—facing the road, with two large doors. Behind are three living-rooms for Martinez and his family, and a great big tin-roofed barn where we hope presently to keep a big stock of baled hay and sacks of corn for our customers. In one corner of it I am putting up a canvas partition to make a bedroom for myself. Better than living with Martinez and his nagging wife and squalling brats.

One end of the front room is to be a drinking saloon, and the other end the general store. Already it looks most business-like, and I am impatient for the opening day, as are heaps of people from the country behind, who all say they will give us their trade, as the only other store of any size is a day's ride farther away from where they live.

I'm in on a good thing this time I believe, and am nobody's servant.

A pity about those glorious mountains away beyond. They beckon me. When I have made a small fortune here I shall answer their call.

PROSPERITY

No. 12

Tacanas

YE gods! Never was there such a roaring business as this one. Already we have sold almost our entire stock, paid for it, and bought treble the quantity on credit.

Our fame is spreading far and wide. Men who have never before visited Tacanas are now coming here with their produce and returning to their forest homes with stores for their work-people and families. Troops of mule and ox waggons unload their timber at the siding. The animals are turned loose in a paddock we have made. We supply them with fodder. The drivers buy stores for the weeks to come before their next visit, then proceed to drink themselves asleep at our store.

Women ride in from far away and buy lengths of dress stuff and boots and shoes, etc. We are going to stock sewing-machines presently. Men buy shot-guns and revolvers and ammunition, spades, axes, ploughs and almost anything you can think of.

It is all quite alarming and very exhilarating.

We work about eighteen hours a day, but are too busy and prosperous to feel tired.

The reason for such a boom is not only because the situation of our store is very convenient to the district, but because our complete ignorance of trade has caused us to sell much cheaper than anyone else anywhere in the province.

Before we opened Martinez asked me what margin we should add to the cost price in order to make a good profit. I had no sort of idea about what was customary, but daren't betray the fact. It would have been betraying the great city of London.

I made a rough guess and said fifteen per cent. was the London rule.

Apparently the local rule hitherto has been nearer a hundred per cent., so naturally our goods are quite the cheapest ever heard of by these people, and they find it pays them to travel many miles out of their usual route to trade with us.

Martinez, little man, tries hard to persuade me to raise our prices: says we are throwing money away. I argue that as we have invested no capital and in one month sold three hundred pounds' worth of goods and were left with a profit, we can possibly sell ten thousand pounds' worth in our first year by the same method and have over a thousand pounds clear profit.

He argues that if we charged double the margin on cost price we should make double the profit. I disagree. It is the number of our customers and the amount of goods they are able to buy with their money which makes our profit. If we raise our prices, less people will come to us and the fewer goods they will be able to buy with their money.

I am very firm about it, and there is little time to argue the matter. Martinez keeps on trying to add a bit to the price of things he sells, but our customers have spread the news of our prices between themselves and soon tell him that he is trying to do them, and appeal to me.

Credit trade is a bit of an anxiety and I want to forbid anything but cash transactions. Here again my partner disagrees with me and gives credit to many people. It means a lot of book-keeping and risk of loss, which I think is quite unnecessary while we are doing such a roaring trade for cash.

Must stop now. I am very tired and it is after midnight.

DRINK AND THE DEVIL

No. 13

Tacanas

WILLIAM WHITELEY of the Wilderness is what I am—and a very weary Willie! We find that quite the most profitable part of our business is the liquor trade. Also it is quite the lowest, dirtiest, nastiest trade in the world I should say.

The men of these parts are a nice lot generally, but very drunken. As soon as the fame of our cheap prices spread

abroad we were invaded by a host of men who had ridden in from leagues away to see the new store and get drunk cheaply.

They became such a nuisance that I raised the prices to scare them away a bit. But it had little effect. They like this place. It is big and well-lit, and we have chairs and tables where they can gamble with cards. They can buy a tin of salmon or tongue, and so forth, whenever they are hungry, so here they come, almost every night of the week, from one part of the country or another.

They get very drunk, and often very quarrelsome. We have had several bad knife fights already. I have armed myself with a heavy stick, with which I contrive to keep a little order at times, though I find my fists handier as a rule.

Men complained that, though our gin and wine and cognac—the popular drinks—were good and cheap, they were not strong enough.

I found out from the wholesalers in Tucuman that the usual custom is to buy very potent and cheap liquors in demijohns, put it into bottles marked with good labels and sell it as the genuine article.

I suppose my moral fibre is decaying with the amount of drink I find I am compelled to take to avoid offending my customers, so I gave way to the suggestion, with the result that I am selling drink at about two hundred per cent profit; tons of it.

Every night at midnight, I insist on clearing the store. Occasionally I have to pull two or three completely unconscious men out into the road by their feet. Others get quarrelsome and have to be cajoled or threatened. Once or twice I have had to use violence. These men are much more frightened of a clenched fist than of a knife!

A few nights ago two *gauchos*, in a very playful mood, rode their horses in at one door of the store, shot a dozen bottles off the shelves with their revolvers and rode out of the other door and away to their forest lairs. I know who they are and shall collect from them on their next visit I expect.

With one thing and another my nerves are a bit jangled. I wear a revolver in my belt all the time now, but hope I shall never have to use it.

We sell a horrible amount of wine. The men drink it in pint mugs—or half litres—as we drink beer at home. Here, also, complaint was made of the strength. It failed to make them drunk enough, though they liked its flavour. We now add to half a cask of wine a litre of essence of alcohol, and some colouring matter and fill up with water. Everybody is satisfied, profits soar, yet there is something very nasty about it all.

A FRIEND IN NEED

No. 14

Tacanas

THE heat here is now terrific. No rain for months, though for several days the sky has been full of heavy thunder-clouds away to the north over the foothills.

The air is suffocating. The dust rises with every horse or vehicle that passes and seems to be too sticky to settle again and just hangs in the atmosphere like a fog.

Last night a queer thing happened.

I had ejected the last drunk, and, being too tired and hot to think of sleeping, I took a chair outside and sat meditating and watching the almost continual streams of lightning to the north. It lit up the entire landscape at times and the distant thunder was so heavy and incessant that it might have been the whole vast ranges of mountains tumbling down.

I had drunk too much myself; not for any pleasure I got from it, but because it seems imperative that a publican—which is what I am—shall, at times, drink with his customers. I was merely fuddled and depressed; sort of dyspeptic, I suppose, and not at all like sleeping.

In one flash of lightning I thought I saw some creature crawling through the thick dust of the road towards me in a most stealthy way.

It was black dark between the flashes, so I waited for another flash. For awhile there was only distant flickering lightning which did not illuminate the road at all.

Then a big flash and I saw that the creature had crept nearer and was crawling directly at me and about twenty feet away.

It was lightish in colour and about the size of a large cat, but low on the ground, apparently without legs. It seemed to squirm and wriggle along the ground.

No animal I had ever heard of seemed to fit the vision I had seen. I was perhaps too dejected to be frightened. I felt that to be attacked by some strange beast of the night might be a relief; something to fight with that wasn't full of my spurious liquor.

Unconsciously I rose to my feet, expecting at any moment to feel the thing hurtle through the air at my throat, for it appeared to have been crouching as though to spring.

Another vivid flash and I saw the thing was almost at my feet. The light went. A lump rose in my throat and I sat down in my chair with a sob of gratitude, for I knew that God had sent me what I most needed.

The thing at my feet squirmed and wriggled. At its after end something fluttered feebly and apologetically. Never was there such a picture of beseeching and pleading.

Then a hot nose touched my hand.

Gently I stroked a hot little head and in that second was forged a love that will never die in the poor, starving little dog who, out of the sultry angry night, had come to me for help.

Hurriedly I went in, lit a lamp, found milk and biscuits and fed the poor thing. If I live a thousand years I shall never forget the gratitude in those brown eyes. For, mark you, he is not one of the pariah cur-dogs which are so common here, and so unpleasant that they are not worthy of the name of dog, but a half-bred terrier with manners and habits and gestures which show plainly that he has been some man's pal and has lost him.

Now, he never leaves me. All day long he has watched me and wagged his tail every time I have glanced at him. I have bathed him and made him a collar out of a strap and he is the proudest and happiest little fellow alive and growing fatter hour by hour, though still desperately thin.

I have called him Pimiento.

He knows I am writing about him. He is pretending to be asleep at my feet, but is wagging his tail gently.

"Beggars on horseback" actually exist hereabouts. Several times have bedraggled individuals on miserable horses arrived here from Heaven knows where and begged sustenance for man and beast. The horses seem to be trained to put on the most pleading expressions and their condition is so dreadful that it is impossible to refuse. In this country of such vast distances between settlements, and where horses are two-a-penny, it is perhaps not so surprising as it sounds.

DROUGHT. A PRAIRIE PRINCE

No. 15

Tacanas

DUST! Miles and miles of hot, swirling, acrid, septic dust, which never settles but hangs in the air like a fog day and night.

One's eyes and teeth and ears are always full of dust. It leaves a bitter-sweet taste and smell which is ineradicable. The heat meanwhile is terrific. A scorching sun blazes all day overhead and seems to suck the dust up from the parched earth and roast it and never let it fall again. One sweats in the shade, and there is no shade in this desert except indoors; and bakes dry in the sun.

All the filth of generations must be carried in this swirling fog, to be breathed and swallowed, and there is no escape. The fog is as thick indoors as out. Even under bedclothes a suffocating beastliness penetrates. As one lifts the bedclothes a thicker cloud rises and swirls slowly, yet without apparent gravity, so that it never seems to settle again.

Every drop one drinks or scrap one eats is gritty with the all-pervading filth and tastes of it. The eyes of every man and animal are rimmed with a pale fawn crust of clotted filth, so that all eyes look alike and all expression is so distorted that it is impossible to know friend from enemy.

The traffic about this place has so increased because of our business that the desert has been churned up in all directions,

loosening the top surface of the soil, which is many feet deep without the slightest sign of moisture.

Groups of horsemen and cattle and troops of mule and bullock wagons flounder through the fog with the faces of the drivers swathed in folds of the *ponchos*, which all wear. As they come and go they are quite indistinguishable from twenty feet away. Thicker swirls of fog precede, envelop, and follow them every inch of their way. Only by the greater density of the fog about them, the creak of vehicles, and the muffled cursing of the men, can one tell that traffic moves. The dust on the ground is so deep and soft that all footsteps are silenced as by thick snow.

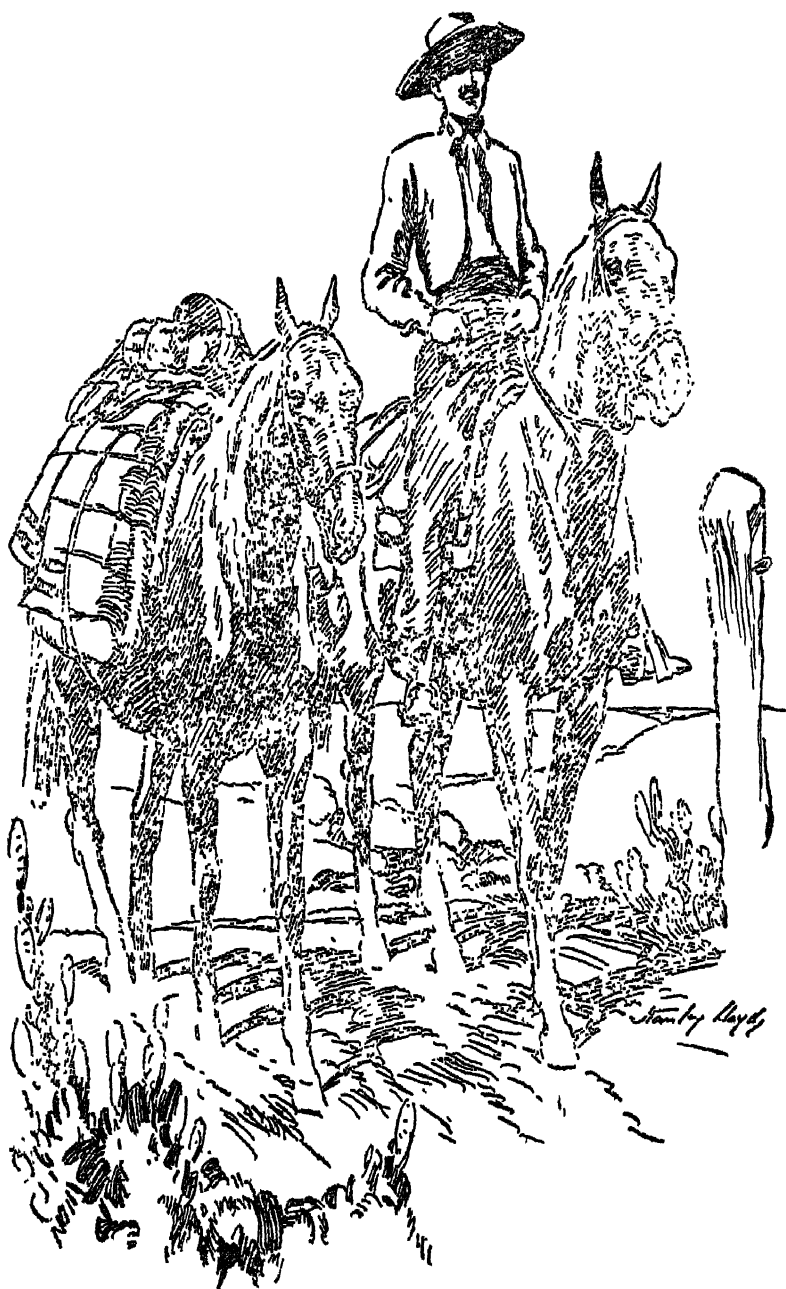
You will think it is all very grim and will imagine that everyone's spirits are as depressed as mine. Not a bit of it. The locals are used to it. They know that these frightful conditions presage the longed-for rain, which will bring this rich, deep soil into immediate fertility.

Though the poorer cattle are dying—weary mules are left to die in the road outside this house, to be fought for by crowds of vultures, whose croaking cries disclose their unseen presence—no one seems to mind very much. They know that the end of the drought is near. They expect these conditions every year and are, apparently, pleased because they are not as late as usual, as we in England might welcome a late fall of snow heralding an early spring.

There is much festivity in the store. The dust engenders mighty thirsts. The promise of early rains causes extravagance, so that a spirit of almost Christmas conviviality is abroad.

As the swathed men stumble rather blindly into the store, shaking the dust from their *ponchos* and hats and blowing it from their moustaches, one is reminded of a snowstorm at home, but oh, how different it all is!

This is indeed the end of winter here. The rich summer is at hand. The new grass and plants will soon be springing from the dead soil, yet we are at the end of six months of blazing sunshine, with never a tiny cloud in all that time. For the last month the heat has been simply terrific, day and night, and increasing at an incredible pace. I feel as if I were tightly shut in an oven with something burning and smoking all about



HE WAS A MOST IMPRESSIVE FELLOW

me. I want to yell out to someone—God only knows who—to say that I *must* escape, that it is impossible to endure such a condition a moment longer, that I shall be roasted alive and suffocated if I have even a minute more of it. Yet, day after day it gets worse, and I am still alive. Day after day, the people all about me are more hopeful and more hilarious as they smell the rain which they know is coming.

They tell me that, presently, just before the rains arrive, a moisture will pervade the air and lay the dust. Then they can count, almost to an hour, when the rains will break.

Well, they are welcome to their hopes. Personally, I believe the world is dead; that there never will be any more rain; that the sun has got loose in the sky and is fast approaching the earth to burn us all into ashes.

Probably these people would have similar, but inverse, ideas if they were to experience a snowstorm in England.

I must tell you of a queer experience I had a few nights ago. A magnificent fellow rode in one afternoon on a beautiful and well-kept horse, leading another equally good, which was loaded with gear for a long journey.

He was a most impressive fellow; not very tall but so perfectly made, so handsome, and with such a knightly bearing that he dominated all about him and commanded instant interest before he uttered a word.

There were many people about the store as this man dismounted, and tied his animals to the hitching-posts. For no apparent reason, all conversation was cut short and everyone turned to watch, which was very surprising, as numerous strangers now arrive every day, because of the fame of our store, and no one pays much attention to them.

This man was dressed in rather more elaborate style than a *gaucho*, but not noticeably so. His silver-mounted saddle and bridle, spurs and whip, and so on, were no more costly than can be seen on any Sunday or holiday amongst the locals. It was just some strange air of personality that this man carried about him which drew the attention of all of us. The sort of sensation one experiences—a faint creeping of the flesh—when one at last catches sight of royalty after long waiting in a crowd. But this man created the impression without any heralding,

without any aid to the imagination, born of newspaper pandemonium, such as always precedes the arrival of royalty. It was something real, and very disturbing.

Everything he did, as we watched him, was surprising but utterly unostentatious. He seemed to be quite unaware of the twenty pairs of eyes fixed on him as he slowly, but very efficiently, tethered his horses. My first shock was when I saw him pat each horse's neck as he turned away from them: a gesture of affectionate care which is unknown amongst these people, who, though magnificent horsemen, treat their animals as machines and never think of caressing them by the slightest touch. In fact, they rather despise and ridicule anyone who shows any sort of affection for animals.

I almost expected to hear a snort of contempt at the gesture of this stranger, but far from it. As he turned towards us and walked slowly through the clinging dust, everyone made a faint and unconscious movement of deference. Almost unnoticeable, but very significant. It was obvious that no one present had the least idea who the stranger might be. There is no sort of local or national lineage or aristocracy which could have accounted for the attention this man aroused. It was the effect of sheer personality, as instantaneous and spontaneous as it was extraordinary.

He halted a few feet away from the door where we were all congregated and doffed his hat courteously, as he looked at us with the steadiest blue eyes between their dust-rimmed lids.

With a low, but very resonant, voice he saluted us and asked who was the proprietor. Martinez was in his quarters, so I was presented.

Then another surprise when his immediate request was for fodder and water for his animals, instead of refreshment for himself, as is the invariable first necessity here. He refused any assistance about tending his horses, and when they were disposed of another shock came as he asked where he could wash himself.

He presently appeared looking very fresh and clean, and in the same slow voice, yet implying more of a command than a request, he invited us all to drink with him.

There are certain local or national conventions about such matters here. A request that complete strangers shall accept hospitality is often regarded as an unwelcome familiarity. I was surprised to notice how willingly, almost deferentially, everyone assented to this suggestion.

Even old Dionicio, the most proud and independent man usually, accepted, and asked the stranger a few polite questions concerning his journey and destination.

He replied that he had come from very far away in the interior, where he owned much land and big herds of cattle. Very quietly, and with the most matter-of-fact tone and no suggestion of boasting, he said that he had more money than he knew what to do with and therefore intended to visit Europe for a few months. He glanced at me with his penetrating eyes and a pleasant smile on his lips, exposing perfect teeth, as he said this, evidently paying an implied compliment to the continent I obviously came from.

I was very much interested. The man, for all his quiet manner, was certainly little more than a savage, quite unacquainted with civilized life and, as I presently ascertained, unable to read or write. That such a man should speak so quietly about travelling in Europe struck me as remarkable, yet nothing could have been more certain than that he was perfectly capable of looking after himself. There was a quality about him which defied anyone to attempt the slightest liberty: a composure and assurance which showed that, for all his illiteracy, he would rapidly acquire the customs of whatever society he found himself in, perhaps dominate it.

There is something very interesting about the fact that so many rich and influential landowners in this wild land cannot read or write, yet are very capable of looking after their big interests. It appears that their brains develop a capacity of detailed memory which educated people are quite incapable of acquiring. Almost as though the written or printed word is a childish aid for weaker folk. A very short conversation with such a man soon dissipates any idea that they are ignorant. The quality of their brains is at once startlingly evident. The thoughts they express and the questions they ask are always so

concisely stated and so well ordered, that one's own perhaps casual and disconnected remarks sound crude by comparison.

Of course this isn't so with the lower orders, the *peons* and cowboys, who are very casual, though intelligent. It occurs in those men whose ancestors, probably for generations, perhaps ever since the early Spanish conquests of this country in mediæval times, have held authority over large tracts of land which they own. No schools existing near them, they often grow up without the slightest education in the sense that we understand it, but with infinitely more alert brains than most educated people possess.

It is interesting to conjecture how this man I tell of, who has reached maturity—he is about twenty-eight, I suppose—will be affected by European life in big cities. Either he will be so overwhelmed that he will drown himself in drink, or, more likely, with such a personality, he will come back full of new ideas and perhaps reach a brief fame and a sudden end as the leader of yet another revolution.

I talked to him till after midnight, answering his many astute questions about how to get to Europe and what cities and places to visit. Whether the three thousand pounds he carried would be enough to pay for his trip? How he should change it into foreign currency, and so on? All very difficult to answer since he couldn't read or write. Problems of banking, letters of credit, and so forth, were mysteries which I thought him incapable of grasping.

Bit by bit I was made to see how little I knew. In the part of the country he comes from, mineral prospectors often pass and stay at his home. He has acquired a wonderfully complete knowledge of all sorts of things and places and financial methods. He was content to let someone else do the spade work of account keeping, filling in cheques, etc. He merely put his mark to what his clear brain knew was the correct result.

He was so quietly confident of his capacity to deal with the shrewdest business men he might encounter that I felt more and more inferior as I talked to him. I began by being rather patronising, I'm afraid, but if he noticed it he was too decent to show any resentment.

He was so astoundingly handsome that I am wondering how

he will react to the wiles of artful ladies who will inevitably assail him wherever he goes.

We finished a bottle of cognac between us before we separated. He never changed a breath, while I became first garrulous, then argumentative, and finally comatose. He was as courteous through all my phases as he was when he started, and contrived to pump all the information he required out of me before the end.

In the morning when I got up, at daybreak, he had departed. He was to ride to a biggish town a hundred or so miles down the line, sell his horses there and take the express—which doesn't stop here—to Buenos Aires.

I don't know if I have made it clear to you at all, but this man left me with the impression that princes still live in wild forests whence they may at any time ride out to conquer the world. If ever a man was born to rule it was this strange fellow from far away in the remote forests of the interior.

Who can say? Perhaps his ancestors were kings in ancient Spain; or is he just one of wild Nature's princes?

I felt a great increase of loneliness when I found him gone.

P.S.—I see that I have forgotten to tell you the most interesting item of the visit of this stranger. In the late afternoon we all trooped over to the station, according to custom, to see the local train come in and gather news, etc. Stranger went with us. We boarded the train and had an iced drink in the restaurant car and bought iced butter and other little luxuries. Stranger showed no particular interest until we all stood watching the train steam away across the great plain, and disappear in a cloud of dust. He lingered a little with a smile on his fine face.

"Very interesting," he remarked.

"What is?" we asked.

"That train. I've never seen one before."

EARTHQUAKE

No. 16

Tacanas

THE rains have come. Tremendous storms and deluges. The road outside is a sea of mud, a foot deep at the moment, yet such is the heat that if it doesn't rain again, by to-morrow it will be dust once more.

Yesterday we had an earthquake. First of all a queer deep rumbling noise as of some colossal machine. All the people in the store, except myself, knew what it was and ran out into the road lest the rather shaky roof should collapse.

I watched them in surprise, and not a little fear, and never thought of earthquakes until, suddenly, I felt the whole world quiver under, over and round me, as though it had at that instant turned to jelly.

I leapt over the counter and ran out to the road.

Another stronger and longer tremor, then more rumbling from nowhere and everywhere. A pause while one's senses became numb; then a sudden fresh breeze, which evidently told the natives that all danger was over. They smiled at each other as we all re-entered the store.

For a moment I couldn't make out what caused the strange difference in its appearance. Someone pointed to the shelves where some two hundred or so bottles of liquor stood.

Almost every one of them had turned with its face to the wall. Instead of the light colour of their gay labels we looked at their dark backs. Not one had fallen. Some mysterious centrifugal force in the earth tremors had made them dance round on their shelves. Quite incredible, and I should have disbelieved my own eyes if I had not had to turn the whole lot round again with my own hands. I hope the next earthquake will complete the circuit and not give me so much trouble.

Our affairs are not quite so flourishing. I wish we had never gone in for the drink business, though it is an essential complement for any country store here.

My partner will have nothing to do with that part of our trade. Makes all sorts of excuses and admits frankly that he is afraid of drunks. So am I, but I won't let 'em see it.

The result is that we have divided our labours. Martinez attends to the general store all day and I do most of my work from five p.m. till midnight, whilst Martinez shuts himself in his quarters and quarrels with his wife—a strange being whom one scarcely ever sees.

Martinez has raised the prices of his merchandise and is accused of giving short weight so that we have lost some clients and attract no new ones. Silly policy.

I tried to assert my will at first, but, having agreed to a division of interests, I couldn't say much. As neither of us has put a penny into the business, I couldn't claim risk to my capital. Anyhow, we still have more work than we can deal with without hiring help, and that can't be got.

We have a *peon* who cleans up for us and helps with heavy merchandise—our barn is now stacked with tons of baled hay, ploughs and other bulky goods.

Excuse my bad writing, but my hand is shaky these days. I can't stand the strain of this work without stimulants, and the heat is terrific; I have an unquenchable thirst all the time.

Pimiento is now fat and well and quite good-looking. I fancy that he disapproves of whisky. I've just poured one out for myself and he is gazing at me with a sorrowful look in his eyes. Bless him, he doesn't understand.

I'm more than glad to have him about. He is the only one I can talk English to and I believe he understands it. I find myself discoursing most eloquently to him, at night in my queer little cubicle, after I have shut the bar. But if he is going to show disapproval of my taste in drink, I shall have to talk to him severely. 'T'isn't right.

INDIANS.

DRINK AND THE DEVIL AGAIN

No. 17

Tacanas

HAPPY Christmas! A bit late to wish you that, but I forgot it in my last letter.

Here it's always Christmas now. Nothing but festivities, wassail and flowing bowls. The temperature isn't exactly Christmassy. A hundred in the shade—if there was any—isn't quite right. I have some tinned plum puddings which I got from Buenos Aires. Can't make these silly natives eat 'em, even when I pour brandy on 'em and set 'em alight: the puddings I mean, not the natives.

Talking of natives, a family of full-blooded Indians has camped here, in the middle of the road. (It isn't really a road, just a lot of loose mud or dust between the cactus with signs of cart tracks. It is called the Camino Real, which means "royal road" I believe, and they tell me that this is the old trail used by the Spanish *conquistadores* hundreds of years ago.)

These Indians are the dirtiest, lousiest, laziest creatures I have ever seen. A man and four women and a lot of kids. They arrived from the east about a week ago: the man on a skin and skeleton of a horse; the women on foot with huge loads on their backs, shuffling along behind. Some of the kids also carried large bundles, others carried live fowls tied by the legs and thrown over their shoulders. One led another corpse-like pony, which was heavily laden and had more fowls suspended from its load.

This queer caravan halted outside our store and gazed about with animal eyes and decided it would be a good place for a camp. The man dismounted and came in and made strange clucking noises at me, like a fowl with a sore throat. He produced a nickel coin or two from the rags about his middle, which were his only clothes, and indicated that he wanted a glass of wine—our cheapest drink.



THEY ARRIVED FROM THE EAST ABOUT A WEEK AGO

He also bought a small tin of sardines, which he took out to his family. The whole lot of 'em gathered round and shared the tin between them. Dipping in their filthy fingers and picking out tiny scraps, they evidently thought it a grand feast. They ended by licking the empty tin in turn several times.

They moved along the road for a few yards and proceeded to make a camp. A few rags of cloth, stretched from the wire fence of the railway to some sticks they found round about, make their tents. More as an indication of where they shall congregate than for any shelter they get, I should say.

The fowls were turned loose and began at once to eat dust ravenously. Or it looked like it, for I could see nothing else on the ground they pecked at so energetically. The ponies were led off into the plain and hobbled. Since the rains came there is a surprising growth of green stuff here and there, little plants, and even some grass.

Quite a lot of cattle have appeared from somewhere, and seem to like these new growths. Perhaps the Indians have an idea of a little cattle stealing.

Yesterday two more male Indians arrived, lean, hungry-looking creatures with Mongolian eyes and long, straight, black hair. They rode bareback ponies, which were not in too bad condition.

They stayed for lunch with the first Indian family. You won't believe me when I tell you what they had for lunch. The father of the first family received them with every sign of welcome. He tied their ponies to the fence, placed a couple of old wooden boxes for them to sit on, gave them maize leaf and tobacco to make cigarettes with, handed them a smouldering twig from the little fire where the kettle was boiling.

Interesting to watch the ceremony of hospitality amongst such animal creatures.

When the kettle boiled a squaw prepared the gourd of *maté* tea which each man took a suck at several times. Then the visitors prepared to depart, but the host bade them keep their seats.

He made a louder clucking noise and another squaw, with a baby under her arm, crawled out from the conglomeration of rags and sticks which was her home and stood before her spouse.

He looked from her to his guests with a sort of anxious grin on his face, then stooped and picked up an empty egg-shell from the rubbish about his feet and held it out to the woman.

She passed her infant to another squaw, then lifting a corner of the rags which covered her breast she proceeded to squeeze milk into the egg-shell. Her man then presented this delicacy to his guests in turn, who swallowed it with obvious relish and gratitude; very much the sort of expression civilized men put on when they have been given a glass of their host's old vintage port!

Talking of port: this life is getting too much for me. I never have time to get quite sober—or the inclination. But I am making money—lots of it. We haven't had a chance for any sort of stock-taking yet and I haven't the least notion of how to set about such a manœuvre.

Apart from bad debts—Martinez has consistently refused to stick to cash trade only and has given a lot of credit to people I consider doubtful—we are several hundred pounds on the right side.

We pay cash for all our purchases, and owe nothing. We have a fat balance in the bank and a large stock of goods, so that even if we should make bad debts we have a fine profit.

All rather like magic. It all seems too easy.

If only I could persuade my partner to let me find a man to run the drink business, all would be well. As it is, I feel that I shall be a wreck before long. I just can't spend hours of every day dishing out drinks to these ruffians unless I drink with them.

Martinez refuses to employ assistants. He won't trust anyone. I agreed with him in the first place that we should have no assistants except labourers, so I can't insist now.

I wish the whole business was my own. I should never have had the enterprise to start it by myself. Martinez doesn't like me any more than I like him. We seldom speak to each other now. How we shall settle up our profits presently I don't know.

I begin to be afraid that as we have no legal partnership agreement I may find myself in a big difficulty.

MORE DRINK

No. 18

Tacanas

YOU have never watched money dissolve before your eyes, have you?

I have. Not metaphorically dissolve by extravagance and thriftlessness; we have all seen that; but actually dissolve, melt, disappear.

I see it happen every night and it is a disgusting performance to watch after the first time or two. I'll tell you, presently, how it occurs.

This business has developed into a drinking and gambling-den. It has attracted all the bad characters from hundreds of miles around. There are no police or other representatives of the law anywhere near, so that this store has become a rendezvous for outlaws and undesirables of all sorts.

Whether it is because the concocted drinks I supply are stronger than elsewhere, or that Martinez can be persuaded to give credit more easily in his department, or because Tacanas has become a busy station for despatch of produce from the country to the east, I cannot say. Anyhow, it is the effect and not the cause that is troubling me.

Our general merchandise trade is still flourishing, and profitable I hope—though our list of debtors has become alarming. Also we have been compelled to go into the business of produce merchants. We found that the only way to collect any payment from some of our customers was by taking their produce in exchange.

Landowners here frequently come in with trains of mule wagons from far away and have no money wherewith to buy stores or to make the inevitable "fiesta" that they and their men demand after months of hard work in the backwoods.

There are no representatives here of the railway company or other buyers of produce, so that there has been no means of obtaining loans on the security of the goods brought in; nothing

until the goods had been loaded and despatched to their destination.

In consequence we found ourselves pestered to become lenders. I refused to agree, so we compromised and bought several loads of timber, hides, etc., at favourable prices. We have even bought cattle and have a piece of land enclosed near by to keep them in whilst waiting for railway trucks.

It would all be excellent business but for the drink part of it, which is awful.

I insisted, a week or two ago, on employing a man to deal with the bar. On the second night he was drunk and utterly incapable. I forgave him, despite my partner's taunts, and gave him another trial. He survived three more days, then disappeared with a day's cash and one of our new saddles, and a neighbour's horse.

It meant a big row with Martinez, even though I offered to make good the loss out of my share of profits. Lord only knows when, or if, or how, we shall ever be able to figure out our position. Our books are in a hopeless tangle. It will require a skilled accountant to straighten them out. No—even he couldn't do it.

I see plainly that Martinez wants to get me out of the business. He has a brother-in-law who is anxious to join him. They are welcome to it if they will pay my share of the profits to date, but they are not going to persuade me to walk out with nothing, which I believe is what they are after.

Brother-in-law spent a couple of days here recently. A man I couldn't like. Greasy and sly. Has a job of some sort in Buenos Aires.

About this dissolving money. Our thirsty and unquenchable clients seem to spill as much of their liquor as they drink. They emphasize all their conversation by banging their mugs and glasses on the counter and tables, and by waving them in the air and splashing the contents about in grand gestures of independence, rather like kids in a nursery when left unguarded. Result is that the counter is a pool of liquor all the time.

I told you about our comic paper currency; anything from about sixpence upwards is in bank-notes. It looks as if these notes are never renewed, but remain in currency until they are

quite worn out. Many of them have been repaired, again and again, with gummed paper; sometimes sewn together after having been torn. They are often so soiled and crumpled that they resemble scraps of thin soft rag and it takes quite a while to identify their value.

Imagine a drunken fellow pulling out a handful of such rubbish and banging it down on the counter in a pool of alcohol with a grand, reckless gesture. After a moment or two many such notes have dissolved into a pulp which is quite unrecoverable. It happens every day here; I have to be very alert and determined lest these extravagant fellows claim that they have paid me with this pulp. I just ignore any money banged on the counter in that way and leave them to try to collect the remains.

Interesting to consider how much profit the Government or the banks make in a year by such disappearance of these notes—which represent their liability I suppose.

I have to sell liquor all day now. I fear we should have a dangerous riot if we refused. These lumber and cattle men are nice enough fellows if they can have their own way, but they wouldn't hesitate to smash this place up if we tried to enforce any regulations.

Dionicio Moreno is in here almost every day and is a great help in some ways. He can talk to these men in a way that they understand and persuade them to be reasonable. Unfortunately he often gets drunk himself, then he is anything but reasonable. He hates Martinez, but seems to be very fond of me. He often lends me a hand behind the bar, shouting and laughing and sometimes smashing glasses, but being really useful at the same time. Unfortunately he now owes us a lot more than I like. He promises to settle up every day, but never does. Occasionally he takes charge of my job and sends me off for a ride on his horse for an hour or two. You can't think how Pimiento and I enjoy those hours.

A day or two ago I saw a small owl sitting on a bush, staring at me as I rode past. It turned its head so far to watch me that I expected its neck to snap. I was so interested, that I turned my horse to see just how far the owl could turn its head. Believe it, if you like, but I rode round and round that owl six

times and its head just went round and round after me without a movement of its body! When I stopped I expected to see the head go spinning back as the neck unwound, but no such thing happened. I began to think I was very, very drunk and rode away from that queer bird in a good deal of anxiety.

Dionicio laughed when I told him. He says that the truth is that the owl can turn its head round so rapidly that no human being can see the movement and gets the impression that the head revolves always in the same direction.

My own head is revolving after so much writing; I am really very tired.

Pimiento is a great joy to me. He plays about outside all day, but never fails to gallop in once an hour to lick my hand and see that I am all right.

I have long talks with him in English every night before I go to sleep. No one else to talk English to here. Rather muddled English at that time of night, I fear, but Pimiento doesn't mind.

I SELL OUT. FEVER. LOVE AGAIN

No. 19

Plaza Hotel, Tucuman

I HAVE left Tacanas. Sold out my share to Martinez without too much difficulty.

Dionicio came to me one night and gave me a lecture. He said I was drinking too much and should give up the business and go away. I was just sober enough to know that he was drunk himself, so I laughed at him and told him not to be silly.

"But, Don Juancito" (the "cito" is a form of endearment), "I am getting old and drink doesn't do me any harm. You are a young man and are not accustomed to the dirty work you are doing here. (How he knew that is more than I can say.) Give it up and find yourself a proper job somewhere."

"And how am I to settle up with Martinez? Who is to deal with the accounts and find out what my share is?"

"Why worry about that? Just say you want to sell him

your share, or ask what he will give you for it. I'll tell you if his offer is fair or not and will see you get an honest deal."

I was in no mood for this patronizing attitude, though I was, and still am, very fond of Dionicio. I suppose I was drukk.

"You're a fine fellow to lecture me, aren't you?" I asked. "Why, you're drunk yourself at this minute. Also, you owe us five hundred pesos or more and look as if you don't intend to pay us."

He looked at me curiously for a while, then laughed heartily, told me to go to bed and departed into the night.

Next morning he came in and paid the whole of his account. Where he got the cash during the night I can't think.

"Now that's settled, let's tackle your partner. You must get out of this place at once."

I was thankful to hear him say so. I felt ill, and realized that I had got to a stage where I could only keep going by incessant doses of whisky. There was that in my friend's eyes which told me of his sincere anxiety and affection for me.

I felt ashamed to think that an Englishman should be in need of help from an illiterate cattle-man of this desert land; that I should have been made to feel how much the better man he was.

Martinez made trouble, but eventually paid up to our satisfaction. No sooner had he done so and I realized that I was free than I collapsed. The world swam about me wildly. I felt Dionicio grab me and lay me down on my bed, then a feeling of falling millions of miles through a world of soft cotton wool until at last I awoke and found that it was night. My head was aching and throbbing. I longed for drink, but felt too ill to move.

"Horrible, if I am to die here alone in the corner of a dirty barn," I thought miserably. Pimiento licked my hand sympathetically, as if he understood. Then I wondered why a faint light was burning somewhere near me and had a feeling that I wasn't alone. I couldn't worry about it, I felt too ill. Also I felt my lips moving and heard myself muttering absurd words, yet was quite unable to stop it. I shivered violently and realized that I had a return of West African malaria. Presently the light moved. Great long shadows swept the roof of the barn. The fear of delirium took hold of me. Who, or what, was moving the light?

Suddenly I was fully conscious, more completely sane than I have been for months, as I looked into the eyes which, in the light of a candle, gazed tenderly and enquiringly into mine, eyes from which I had failed for months to gain a sign of recognition.

Here beside me, actually holding up my aching head as she put a glass of water to my lips, was that girl I told you of long ago, when I first came here.

Apparently Moreno had noticed the interest I have always taken in her, and had brought her to nurse me as soon as he realized I was ill. Nothing could have helped me more. No trained nurse could have been more kind and gentle. Naturally I fell more than ever in love with her, but she forbade any sort of affectionate advances, though she did condescend to smile very sweetly at me.

I was astonished and delighted to discover that she is anything but the savage I had thought. She was educated in a convent in Tucuman.

I tried to make her confess that she longs to escape from the squalor of her home, but she wouldn't admit it. She only speaks of her love for her proud, old father and seems to think him some sort of a God. Apparently he once owned a lot of land and cattle, but lost everything.

I was ill at Tacanas for three days, then Dionicio brought me to this hotel in Tucuman, where I am recovering. I have some sort of gastric trouble as well as malaria and must stay in bed for a couple of weeks, says the Argentine doctor who comes to see me. I feel quite glad to obey him, for as soon as I try to stand up everything swirls about and I feel very sick.

Poor Pimiento doesn't understand what is wrong. He spends most of the day sitting on the chair beside me, but every couple of hours he goes out for a scamper in the plaza facing the hotel. He finds lots of dogs to play with there and comes in panting, with his tongue hanging out, and resumes his watch by my side. I don't know what I should do without him all day. He is just the right sort of sick visitor. Lets me talk only when I want to and is delighted with every word I say, and he never bores me with his own opinions.

I tell him all I feel about Angela, my Tacanas nurse. He agrees with me that it would be impossible to contemplate marriage

with anyone with Indian blood in her, yet we both feel that life will be extremely difficult without her now. I shall wait until I find a job, then write to her and ask if she and her father will come to me. Maybe I can find a suitable job for the old man.

With several hundred pounds in the bank I can afford to wait until I find a really good job. I intend to go up into the mountains, where I hear there are many timber estates, cattle ranches, and other such ventures.

I speak the language quite well enough now to take a useful position. What I need is a better knowledge of accountancy.

No, it can't be done. I shall have to make myself forget her. The thought of perhaps having a family of dusky-skinned children is impossible. I shall go far away and bury myself in my work and think no more about her.

Some of the Englishmen here come in and chat to me for a while in the evenings, but I know them so slightly that it isn't easy to talk to them. I want to ask their advice about Angela, but of course I daren't. They would only say something lewd, I expect, and laugh at me, if they thought I was seriously in love.

This love business is very difficult. I have met so few girls in my life that I am, perhaps, susceptible and a poor judge of their characters, but there is something primeval about Angela which, to me, is desperately appealing.

I have written this letter in spasms in the intervals of being sick. Forgive me if it is disjointed and not very coherent.

DEATH OF A FRIEND

No. 20

Plaza Hotel, Tucuman

EVERYTHING has gone wrong with me since my last letter.

Pimiento is dead. I feel terribly alone without him. He used to spend most of every day beside my bed, going out for a frolic in the plaza for an hour or so two or three times a day, returning to me with his face all smiling and happy.

Three days ago he came back in a very different condition.



THE COWBOY LASSOING AND ROPING CATTLE

He was so weak and ill that he couldn't jump up to push open the swing mosquito door of my room. He just crawled up to it and lay down and whined quietly outside.

I knew there was something seriously the matter with him. I thought he had perhaps been kicked by a horse. I got up, compelled my almost uselessly feeble legs to propel me to the door and lifted the poor little fellow up as well as I could and staggered to my bed with him. He lay gasping for a few minutes with his tail wagging very feebly, made an effort to press close to me, licked my hand with a hot, dry tongue, and died.

There is no doubt that he has been poisoned by the brute of a gardener who tends the flower beds in the Plaza. The hotel people tell me that Pimiento and his friends have been naughty about running over the beds in their play and that the gardener has poisoned dogs before for the same crime.

If only I were well enough I would give him a thrashing that would cure him of even looking at a dog again. As it is, I have made myself much worse by getting up for an hour on the night that Pimiento died and, with the help of Burrows, one of the Englishmen here, burying him deep in one of those same flower beds in the Plaza.

I was very ill afterwards and am now a sort of chronic case. The doctor is sending me down to the city of Rosario, on the River Plate, where there is an English doctor. There I shall get proper treatment and soon be well again I hope.

CITY LIFE AGAIN. RODEO

No. 21

Rosario

MY recent letters have been very brief and have merely told you of my recovery and my job.

Strange how fate handles one. Here am I, who have always fought against office life, an accountant in a big firm of grain exporters. The work is interesting but very difficult. All our shipments of wheat and other grain have to be dealt with in English, Argentine, Canadian and Russian currency, as the

firm has agents and branches in each country who require copies of all our invoices and bills of lading for some reason.

Luckily I had time while convalescing to study accountancy, or I should be in a hopeless mess here. As it is, I haven't been found out in any errors and my bosses seem to be pleased with my work. They know that my intention is to get a manager's job on some up-country estate presently and that I am only doing this work in order to qualify for such a job. They have an Englishman on the way out from home who is a trained and qualified accountant. I hope I shall have heard of a suitable job before he comes to take my place.

I went to an international horse show a few nights ago, an annual affair, where all sorts of competitions in lassoing and roping cattle, riding buckjumpers and suchlike tests of skill for cattlemen are rewarded with big prizes.

There were cowboys from all over South America and from U.S.A., Canada and Mexico in the competitions. The arena was a big field, with ample stands for spectators. Hundreds of cattle and horses engaged, as some of the tests were for separating certain animals from a herd while galloping round the arena; all very seriously performed, as such matters are part of the industry of the country and not circus tricks. I never saw such riding or imagined men could do such things with their lassos—*lazos* in Spanish.

They are a grand lot of men, these cowboys, and never grow old apparently. The man I went with was able to take me behind the scenes, where the camps were. No wonder they call them boys. I never saw so much jolly play and ragging amongst any schoolboys, yet many of these were grizzled, lean old fellows of sixty or so. They lassoed each other, lassoed passing girls, lassoed chairs and tables away from each other, and never stopped such fooling.

Their cattle ponies are the cleverest things in horseflesh, and seem to enjoy the fooling as much as their masters. I was rather scared at first, as the ponies were all amongst us and I thought I was bound to be kicked or trampled on. I soon learned that they are so clever with their feet and so gentle and intelligent that, as long as you don't try to jump out of their way, they will never touch you, even amongst a crowd, as we were.

I am more than ever determined to get out again to some place where such men live and work amongst their herds of cattle and horses. One can make as much money there as by chasing a pen across ledgers in an office, and be far more useful.

THE MOUNTAINS CALL

No. 22

Rosario

HURRAH! I have been offered the very job I want, right up in the Andes, in the province of Salta.

A man called Diego Ross, half English—or American—and half Argentine (I haven't met him yet), has heard of me and has written to say that he wants an Englishman to manage the estate he owns there.

It is a vast property, with saw-mills, forests, cattle, a river, jaguar, puma, and all kinds of game; also, alas, a great deal of *chu-chu*, which is the name for malaria here. It will be interesting to study the result of a cross between the West African microbe and the local variety!

At first I have to take charge of the store there, as the present manager, an Argentine, is leaving under protest and refuses to accept an assistant. I have been warned to expect a lot of unpleasantness from him during the weeks before he can be got rid of.

Part of my job is to keep an eye on him and find a pretext for Don Diego to discharge him before his contract expires.

Don Diego lives in Buenos Aires, and has several estates in other parts of the Republic. He is also a railway engineer and contractor and a most important person generally. I am to meet him on the train next week and travel up to the estate with him.

Fate has answered my prayers; or maybe the Gods who live in those vast ranges.

Doesn't matter which as long as I get there quickly.

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A funny thing happened last week. I was sent to the station



THE ARRIVAL OF SMITH

here to meet the man who has come from England to take my place in this office.

I think I have told you that this is a big modern city, with trams, motor-cars, theatres, grand shops, and all the usual fittings. The people are very dressy and the men even dandified, with their gloves and canes and spotless linen, and, always, patent leather shoes. One never sees a cattleman or a farmer in his working clothes here, except on occasions such as the horse show I told you of.

On the station platform I watched the passengers alight, and made several wrong shots at finding my Englishman. All sorts of funny people get off the trains here, as there are so many nationalities always coming and going, but I had never seen anything quite like one fellow I watched.

He was dressed in a wide felt hat with one side fastened up, a corduroy jacket with a belt and vast pockets, a pair of badly-fitting drill breeches held up by a belt full of revolver cartridges, and a pair of very new yellow leggings and heavy boots.

He wandered about the station, looking bewildered and sad. He was very thin, and pale faced, and altogether incongruous. He rather annoyed me by staring at me rudely each time I passed him.

Presently I realized that my man hadn't arrived. The station was empty except for porters and a couple of fruit vendors, who were all grinning as they looked at that pantomime of a big game hunter, or whatever he was, who was still staring at me with a tearful look in his eyes.

Suddenly it struck me who he was. I remembered my first shock at seeing Buenos Aires as a great city instead of an Indian settlement.

"Are you called Smith?" I shouted at him from twenty feet away, praying that he would deny it.

He jumped with relief and joy as he rushed at me and shook my hand and asked if I had come to meet him.

"My God, no, not you," I replied rudely, "I have come to meet a junior accountant to a big city office in the main street, with trams passing the door. The sooner you make yourself look like him the better for everyone. You must come into the lavatory here and take off that disguise at once."

"But can't I wait till I get to a hotel or somewhere? I can't unpack my trunk here."

"Then you'll find your way alone, my lad. I won't move an inch with you in that costume. My orders are to take you straight to the office and introduce you to your employers."

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I felt that if the heads of the firm saw the fellow in that get-up, they would probably send him straight back to England, and I didn't like the thought of that. I had engaged a room for him at my lodgings, where there are several Englishmen living. I couldn't very well take him there to meet their ridicule.

We compromised by driving to a little hotel and hiring a room where I got the poor fellow into something like civilized rig before taking him to the office.

He explained to me, meanwhile, that he had expected to find a crude settlement on the banks of a river instead of the great city which is the Rosario of to-day.

So much for school geography.

BACK TO THE WILD

No. 23

Tucuman

AM spending a few days here, where my new employer has business to attend to and where, incidentally, he spends most of each night at the small Casino which exists in the outskirts of the town.

He is a tremendous gambler and speculator and never misses an opportunity of betting on any and every sort of transaction. Like most people of that type, he is generous. He is paying me a fine salary, with a commission on all profits as well. He is full of vast projects for the estate where I am going. Talks of sinking oil wells, finding gold and precious stones, coal-mines and other mineral wealth. All of which he evidently intends me to do by myself, as he says he doesn't like the climate there and visits the place as seldom as possible, and then only for a couple of days at a time.

The prospect interests me enormously, though I know no more about how to find gold and so forth than I do about astrology. No doubt I shall learn.

The estate contains hundreds of square miles of mountainous forest, almost unexplored, so may possess many of the treasures the owner hopes I shall find. More probably it is just his gambling, optimistic spirit which makes him talk of such things.

All there is at present is a saw-mill and valuable timber, not paying too well; and a large number of cattle ranging through the forest, mostly owned by people who have no right there and whom I have to eject. All very exciting and fulfilling my wildest imaginings of the romance which must lie in those vast mountain ranges.

As I write, I can hear *guitarreros* playing those wild, sad tango tunes somewhere. You can't imagine how they fill one with a sort of determination to struggle on hopefully though life may be full of trouble: also blended with each air is a suggestion of love and passion.

Perhaps that is only my imagination, but at my age thoughts of love occupy a great part of one's mind. I tell myself that it is nothing more than old Mother Nature demanding increase, and that she is a cunning old harriidan to disguise the most ordinary physical desires as something of wonderful spiritual beauty.

I saw Tacanas as the train flashed by a few days ago. It looked a squalid, drab, dusty collection of hovels in the desert.

My heart ached for a sight of one superbly lovely creature who lives there amongst the dusty cactus plants. Or did my heart ache? Has that overworked bit of pumping mechanism anything whatever to do with love? Is it only the effect of generations of false sentiment which makes us blame our hearts for the crudest of our instincts?

I have to go out now to visit an English family who live outside the town.

Will finish this letter to-morrow.

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Next day. Strange that I should have written yesterday about love problems. I asked you several questions about the part our hearts play in it.

Then I went out to tea and tennis at the home of a delightful English family. There I met three English girls who gave me a lot to think about. The eldest of them is engaged, thereby reducing my problem. The other two are twins and so much alike that I felt I wanted to fall in love with and marry both of them.

I managed to concentrate my interest on one of them, who had some trifle of ribbon or other which helped me to distinguish her from her sister. I progressed so well that I have promised to bring her a young deer from the forest on my first visit.

I suppose it is natural, but already the lovely Angela, whom yesterday I longed for painfully, I now see as a crude savage with more than a touch of Indian blood. I am thankful that my encounter with these English girls has saved me from an infatuation which might have had serious consequences.

There are other temptations of a far worse kind, in this tropic town, to a fellow of my age. They are hardly fit to write about, yet are a very important part of the life of all the young men who live here, establishments where music and dancing and "love" are commercialized and licensed.

With one thing and another I am convinced that marriage is a vital necessity. I shall hunt for that little fawn at the first opportunity and bring it here.

PART TWO

MOUNTAINS. JUNGLE. OUTLAWS

No. 24

Miraflores

I HAVE always longed for adventures amidst wild mountain scenery; for life amongst men who know nothing of the streets of cities and who enforce their simple laws by their strength of arm and accuracy of aim alone.

Well, I have got it; all of it, and more. At times I fancy myself back in the days of pirates as I barricade myself in my hut and watch a crowd of drunken men slash at each other with knives, while the forest around echoes with their angry shouts and the ring of steel.

I half expect Long John Silver to hop from behind a tree at any moment and lay about him with his crutch.

It is not always going to be like this. I realize, already, that half the drunken rioting which I have had to witness is instigated by a modern equivalent of John Silver (queerly enough, his name is Juan Largo, which means John Long; which is what brought Long John Silver to my mind), with the idea of frightening me away from the treasure which exists here.

Juan Largo has hitherto owned the store which supplies everyone on the estate with merchandise and liquor.

He is a great fat fellow with an oily manner and a squeaky voice.

My first job was to take over the store from him and find and instal a manager. Largo remains with the meat supply, for the present, and is very sore at having the other business taken from him, as it has been a gold mine. Almost all the men on the estate are in his debt and are afraid of him, which raises a nasty situation for me.

I'm frightened also, but the more frightened I am of anything the greater is my fear of running away from it. So here I stick and stick tight, until I have established my authority over this mob of ruffians.

For the first time in my life, I feel I have a job really worth

doing. If I can escape being knifed or shot for another week or two, I shall be in complete charge here. Then I shall prove whether I am worth anything or not. If I succeed in controlling this place I shall be content to settle down as a peaceful citizen.

The manager is due to leave in a few weeks' time, unless I go first. He is doing his best to get rid of me, but won't succeed.

Don Diego stayed here only one night, then hurried back to Buenos Aires. There is something rather sinister in the dislike, or perhaps fear, he has of this property. It was obvious as soon as we rode over the bridge which crosses the river boundary. I noticed that he adopted an abrupt and aggressive attitude to the men who had been sent to meet us at the station with the horses. Also he ostentatiously pulled his revolver round to the front of his belt, which made me think.

As we rode into the settlement of rough wooden huts, around the saw-mill and the manager's house, several dogs ran out and barked at us noisily. Don Diego whipped out his revolver and, quite unnecessarily but very skilfully, shot one of them dead.

It struck me as an ostentatious display of his marksmanship, born of fear, and performed with the idea of intimidation.

He is a tough, bulldog-looking man of about fifty, brusque, yet genial with most people, but while here was silent and morose.

I don't know whether it is part of the obvious scheme to alarm me into leaving immediately, but the manager and one or two of his cronies tell me that last year Don Diego and his brother were chased out of the estate by the workpeople and barely escaped with their lives. Some dispute about wages, I hear.

It is true that the brother was manager here for a short while, but why or how he left I don't know.

The attitude of almost everyone here has been most unpleasant. So much so that I am certain that a story has been spread about that I am a very undesirable person in every way. Only one man has been more than courteous; so much more, that I am convinced that he is the Long John Silver of the party.

Juan Largo owns a lot of cattle on the estate, for which he pays grazing rights—on how many I must find out. He is also working on cutting and hauling logs for the mill by contract: owns a troop of ox-drawn trucks for the haulage. He also has the contract for supplying all the meat for the two hundred-odd

people employed on the estate. He can neither read nor write, yet has a brain which is as accurate as the best set of ledgers.

He is an oily, unctuous, cunning creature, if ever there was one, but I mustn't let him suspect that I know it. He is, or may be, as useful to me as he is dangerous. In time I shall find out all his business and get control of it. The thought is quite invigorating.

The third day I was here the manager asked me abruptly, rudely in fact, if I had come with the idea of getting his job.

"Don Diego has told you that you shall have my job as soon as he can get rid of me, eh?"

He looked at me so malevolently that I didn't know how to answer him. In my hesitation I felt it best to grin and say nothing, which, as it turned out, was quite the best answer.

The "code of honour" amongst these people is queer. They take pride in being able to lie well and they despise those who are too easily deceived. I don't say that a man will deceive or lie to his friends, but in business transactions the code is a candid intention to deceive and lie whenever possible. Everyone knows it; therefore only fools are unprepared. They declare loudly that they are the most honest men alive and would far sooner be dead than deceive you, but they know that you know they are lying, and if you are fool enough to be taken in by their protestations that is your fault.

Therefore the manager was infuriated when I merely grinned in reply to his question or statement. One of his countrymen would have protested loudly that no such intention existed and that everyone loved everyone else, and that no one could think of hurting anyone, ever.

To be met with silence and a silly grin was more than he could endure.

"Ah! So you can't deny it, Señor Muir?" Whenever they call you Señor Surname, instead of Don Christian name, you may look out for squalls. Don is a polite and friendly prefix, Señor is coldly formal.

"You have been sent here to insult me, eh? To spy on me, eh? To turn me out of my job, eh? Very well! I'll teach Señor Diego Ross that he cannot treat me like this. I will send him my resignation immediately; then he will see if he can run his rotten, stinking estate with the help of *gringos*."

Gringo is a rather insulting name for foreigners of all sorts. This man had worked himself into a fury which quite alarmed me, so that I had to keep on grinning to hide my real feelings.

"I must ride into the station to-day," I said as calmly as I could. "If you like to write to Don Diego at once, I will post your letter at the station. But," I continued meditatively, "I expect you realize when you are well off and will not throw up a good job over a trifling offence to your dignity."

"Ah!" he exploded. "You foreigners do not understand our national pride. Rather than be insulted by suspicions, I would die of starvation. I will write immediately to Señor Diego Ross and resign my position as administrator of his miserable estate."

With that I edged towards the office to encourage him.

"Very well, then, if you must. I will wait for your letter and take it to the station."

He looked at me suspiciously, but was unable to read my thoughts. Stalking into the office, he snatched a sheet of paper and wrote violently, with great flourishes and jabbed full stops as though he were inflicting wounds on his employer.

"There," he snapped as he handed me the envelope. "That will prove that my pride is not a toy to be played with by *gringos*."

Three days later came telegrams saying his resignation was accepted and instructing him to hand over everything to me. Then came copious letters to both of us concerning procedure; none of which the ex-manager will comply with. He refuses to permit me near the office, saying only that he will hand over the keys on the day he goes and nothing more.

As I know nothing of the state of accounts, stocks, cattle, horses or anything, I am not going to find things too easy.

I have telegraphed to Don Diego suggesting that he should come up for a day or two, but he says that it is quite impossible and I must do the best I can.

All very difficult, but exciting.

I have already noticed one or two of the men here who are decent fellows and will help me.

I meant to describe this place to you, but must postpone it till my next.

FIGHTING THE WILDERNESS

No. 25

Miraflores

I USED to gaze at these mountains from far out in the plains and dream of the beauty of life amidst their fastnesses. I am not sure, now, whether the reality is as attractive as the dream. Here I am in one of those fastnesses, shut in by steep jungle-clad hills, and I feel rather imprisoned.

The ride from the station is very beautiful, through forests, over river fords, along the edge of low cliffs with the river below, until one comes to a bridge over a swift, narrow current, with the mountains, heavily timbered and thick with jungle, rising abruptly beyond.

Crossing the bridge, the road turns sharply to the right under a cliff and one is within the estate of Miraflores. Half a mile farther down the river the road opens out into a valley, about two hundred yards wide and half a mile long.

In this valley the saw-mill sings and whines as the great circular saws cut into hardwood logs, the noises echoing away down the valley and up through the forest into the mountains as though shouting man's challenge to those primeval jungles. But the echoes laugh back, scoffing at mankind's puny efforts.

Just beyond the mill is the manager's house and office, where I now live. A brick-built bungalow of four rooms, with a tin roof, and a veranda facing the mill.

Between the mill and the foot of the mountains are the wooden shacks where the workmen live; the sawyers and mechanics. On the river bank there is a jumble of poorer shacks where live the labourers and the hauliers and, at week-ends, the lumbermen from the mountains.

Between that settlement and the mill is the little store, which is the centre of the community. There the women shop and gossip in working hours, and the men drink and fight at night.

The rest of the valley is full of logs of timber waiting to be sawn: *quebracho*—a valuable and imperishable hardwood, walnut, cedar, and a number of other varieties yet unknown to me,

There is a portable light rail-track running from the mill through the little valley, by which the logs are hauled to the saws.

Every afternoon about four o'clock, during pauses in the song of the saws, I hear faint cries far away up in the hills. Queer, unusual cries, to my unaccustomed ears. Then a little later they get louder, while the cracking of great whips sounds sharp and cruel through the silent forest.

Presently the creaking and groaning of the timber trucks can be heard, before the first vehicle, the first yoke of labouring, panting oxen, emerges from the trees followed by dozens of others, their drivers, savage and uncouth, walking beside them yelling, shouting, cursing and cracking their long whips as they guide their teams amongst the clustered logs and discharge their loads.

Then the bullocks are released from their yokes and driven away to pastures in the next valley a mile or two farther down the river.

The people employed here are, for the most part, largely of Indian blood. A rougher, more dangerous-looking lot would be hard to imagine. They received me with obvious mistrust and antagonism. I readily accepted the challenge and have assumed an air of stern authority—rather tiring to one's jaw muscles—now that I am in complete control. Something quite new to me to be always issuing commands and compelling myself to see that they are obeyed.

The first thing I did in that way was to regulate the laws of drinking at the store. Very fortunately I found an exceedingly nice and intelligent young fellow to take charge of it.

He is a quiet, courteous, but rather timid fellow, and is delighted to have my support with his wild customers. The store had been open about eighteen hours a day before I arrived. Now I have restricted it from nine o'clock till midday, and from five p.m. till nine p.m.

At first this rule caused a riot. The men prevented the storekeeper from shutting up the place and threatened to break it, and him, to bits if he didn't do as they demanded.

I hastened to the store as soon as I heard the angry shouting, put on my grimmest look and gave two of the noisiest a taste of a hard fist. Obviously they were quite unaccustomed to

such treatment and went down like skittles. They seemed very disinclined to get up again, for which I was thankful, as I was very frightened behind my assumed angry look. Fortunately the others saw great fun in the discomfiture of their friends on the ground, and, while keeping a wary eye on me and backing out of my reach, they laughed so heartily that I found myself compelled to grin also. Their manner changed at once. They became too friendly and offered me no end of drinks at their expense if I would only permit the store to remain open.

I was instantly more determined than ever. I ordered my two victims to get up at once and help the storckeeper to fix the heavy shutters over the windows. I was astonished at their anxiety to obey me. My authority was established.

Alas, I have not established peace and sobriety. The men have outwitted me by buying bottles, demijohns and even buckets of liquor before the store closes and spend the next few hours carousing in and about their huts.

Saturday night, and all day on Sunday, is the worst time. Then all the axe-men from the hills are here, and a wild lot of great ruffians they are. Also the cattlemen come in on Saturdays for their wages and usually don't leave till Sunday afternoon. They are a steadier lot.

Every Saturday night there have been knife fights and some serious wounding, which I have had to patch up. There is no doctor within a hundred miles of this place, so that I, as the head of things, am looked to in all emergencies. My office is well equipped with first-aid appliances, medicines, and also needles and silk for sewing up wounds. I loathe the thought of the day when I shall have to try my hand at that job. Up to now I have funked it, though I am sure some of the face wounds I have bandaged will leave horrible scars. But these fellows are proud of their scars, so will be quite happy.

I am gradually noticing who are the steady and reliable men, and am certain that I shall presently have quite a number of trusty helpers to stand by me.

The mechanic of the saw-mills, José Cruzado, is a real good fellow. He has been a ship's greaser and seen a little of the world and taught himself quite a lot about machinery. He

doesn't drink and is quite happy to spend all his working hours about the saw-mill.

One of the foremen of *zorras*—as we call the bullock trucks for hauling timber—is also trustworthy. He is called Manuel Palavecino, and is as handsome as his name. He can read and write quite usefully, and, though he says very little, I suspect that he wishes to be friendly.

Then there is the blacksmith, but I shall have to describe him later. He is too precious to be hurried over.

The cattlemen are queer creatures. They live away up in the forest in lonely camps or huts, and have something of the aspect of the wild animals amongst whom they pass their days. Their clothes are entirely of leather to resist thorns. Their saddles have great cowhides shielding their legs. They ride the most alert little horses, which seem to be made of wire and rubber, and are always accompanied by fierce nondescript great dogs.

Altogether it would be hard to find more romantic and adventurous surroundings. I am rather apprehensive about my capacity to rule such a crowd of ruffians as these fellows. It seems as if Fate, in a playful mood, has plunged me into the extremity of what I have asked for and is now going to sit back and see how much I like it.

JUNGLE LIFE—NOBODY LOVES ME

No. 26

Miraflores

PHEW, it is hot! A damp, stewing heat which would soon overcome anyone who surrendered to it.

No air gets into this deep valley. Everywhere there is rotting vegetation and decaying wood. Myriads of insects and frogs keep up an incessant chirping, so that the air is full of their noise, yet at times the noise is so steady and ceaseless, that it only accentuates the absence of other noises. At night the silence of the surrounding jungle is almost frightening. Then the insects and frogs, unseen in their countless millions, seem to jeer at us human beings and to say that our incursion here is but

momentary; that we cannot for long endure the moist and deadly climate, and that before long the valley, the forest and the hills will again belong to its rightful owners, the creatures of the wild.

Great vultures, with gaunt, naked heads and necks, are for ever wheeling over the valley, occasionally settling to devour the offal which the butcher throws away or the carcase of any animal which dies. They also have an air of eternity about them. Their hideous, cruel eyes leer truculently from their red rims as though calculating the amount of flesh on one's bones.

Innumerable snakes and lizards scuttle across every path one treads and hiss menacingly from the tangled undergrowth.

Mosquitoes swarm in black clouds, while their shrill whine is never silent. Even more troublesome are minute sand flies, almost invisible to the naked eye and capable of passing through the finest mosquito netting, which sting venomously and cause painful swellings.

And over all the sun. A vast, cruel ball of fire riding in a brassy sky over the valley. Every day it is more vindictive in its intolerable power.

Everything about me here seems to resent my presence: men, animals, birds, reptiles, insects and all. But I refuse to be dismayed. I accept their challenge, knowing that I shall presently break down their antagonism or else establish enough authority to bend them to my will.

I have never had such complete authority anywhere and find it very stimulating.

There is the usual abundance of half-starved dogs about, nasty-natured brutes who have been made even worse by the way their owners treat them. Dogs are not the friends of man here; they are merely slaves to be kicked and cursed into obedience, with the result that they are mean and cowardly.

Alas, I have to make a confession concerning dogs. Wherever I have been about the world, I have always been able to make friends with dogs after a few minutes' acquaintance.

These native dogs are very difficult. They have never known man's friendship, and mistrust any sort of advances. They are quite incapable of wagging their tails, I believe—don't know the meaning of the gesture. Therefore I am not a bit distressed that I have made no friends amongst them. In any case, they

are too dirty and unpleasant. But there are two quite different dogs here: a huge golden creature, almost pure Newfoundland, left by the previous manager—who treated him brutally, I hear—his name is Don; and a little pure-bred fox-terrier bitch, called Chila. They are inseparable companions and live in a shed behind my house and definitely consider themselves part of the administration. All the native dogs are terrified of them and slink away whenever they pass by. They spend a lot of each day hunting together in the forest or swimming in the river, and are obviously happy.

Now the tragedy I have to confess is this: neither of them will make friends with me. They accept with dignity the good food I provide for them, but show no sign of thanks. They stare at me with calculating eyes and sometimes smell me all over very carefully. They will even allow me to pat them and scratch them behind the ears for a moment, but not one sign of reciprocation can I get. They snub me abominably.

It is very distressing, because they are so clean and well-bred by comparison with all the native dogs. Their bathing in the river keeps them in beautiful condition.

If they were incapable of friendship, like the native animals, I could understand it, but, as if to stress their disapproval of me, they demonstrate real doggy affection for some of the men here; particularly the blacksmith, who is an Italian by birth and understands a dog's character.

It makes me feel more than ever lonely and unwanted, as though there really is good reason why I should not be here. However, I accept, also, their challenge and shall find a way of gaining their friendship, and I feel certain it will be a friendship well worth having.

I have a suspicion that they will help to show me who are the reliable characters amongst the men here, as those whom they condescend to speak to are those whom I believe to be the best men.

I am getting into the work rapidly, but am of course handicapped by complete ignorance of the kinds and grades of timber and of almost everything else. I have to accept the word of the various foremen, and am shewing them that I intend to know all about it very soon.

There are a great number of logs lying about the saw-mills

for which, apparently, no one has tried to find a sale, mostly walnut and cedar and well-seasoned.

There is a big standing contract for railway sleepers which has occupied the entire resources of the mill for many months, but it appears that the man who buys them from us and sells them again to the Railway, is a close friend of the late manager and gets these sleepers at a price which is much too low in my opinion.

There is no written contract, and when I told him that we should have to suspend supply for a while he made a great to-do about "words of honour" and so forth, and tried to compel me to go on supplying him—apparently for ever—at a most unremunerative price.

I have got in touch with a German firm of timber merchants in Buenos Aires who are anxious to buy all the cedar and walnut planks I can supply at a very good price, so we are rapidly clearing up all the encumbering logs about the mill, and saving time and money cutting into such soft wood instead of the very hard wood for the sleepers.

I have made several trips into the forests to where the men are felling the trees. Very interesting.

Generally two men work together and make themselves the crudest of camps, nothing more than a sheet of unbleached calico stretched over a branch, with their saddle blankets for beds and the saddle for a pillow. A huge smoky fire is always burning, to keep away mosquitoes, and perhaps jaguars, and there they do their simple cooking.

Game is plentiful: buck, bush pig, bush turkeys and iguana provide these forest workers with a varied diet. Many men have their guns always beside them as they work, and often get a chance of a shot at birds and beasts which have ceased to be scared of the noise of the ringing axes.

A wonderful sight to see these men fell the great trees. Their skill with the axe is extraordinary and they seem to be absolutely tireless. They are paid by measurement and not by the day, of course!

Apparently they can throw a tree absolutely accurately where they want it to fall, sometimes half cutting through two or three neighbouring trunks and causing the last tree to bring down the others.

Each tree, when felled, is roughly squared with the axe—adzes are not used here—to facilitate loading on the trucks and to save work in the mill. The accuracy of each stroke as the man stands on the log and sends splinters flying all about him is extraordinary.

Part of my job is to measure the logs so as to calculate how much money to allow each axeman at the week-end. After measuring, I mark each log in several places with a hammer whose head bears the same symbol as the estate cattle brand.

I soon found out that some of the axemen chopped off my marks and, by leading me to the logs by a newly-cut track through the bush, would get me to accept the same logs twice, hoping thereby to get double pay.

But I was not tricked often, if at all. I had taken the precaution of cutting a blaze, while unobserved, on some of the surrounding trees, so that I quickly recognised a spot in the tangled jungle which I had visited before. By scratching about amongst the chips on the ground I soon found some with my hammer marks on them and proved that I wasn't such a fool as the men imagined.

The haulage of these vast logs, sometimes weighing five tons or more, is most interesting.

Can you believe that a boy of about fifteen could load a five-ton log with the aid of bullocks only and haul it for miles through forest tracks up and down steep hills? Yet it is done every day. This is how.

The trucks consist of a pair of very strong wheels, about four feet high, with an even stronger iron axle and a wooden over-axle bolted to it, into which is secured the pole, or single shaft.

Two, three, or sometimes four, yoke of bullocks are used, according to size of log to be moved. Arriving alongside the log, the truck is halted as near the log's centre of gravity as possible. One yoke of bullocks is driven to the other side of the log. A chain is attached to the yoke, taken across the log and attached to the top of the far-side wheel. A shout and a crack of the whip and the bullocks pull the truck over upside down on top of the log. The man, or boy, then carefully levers the truck into the exact centre of gravity of the log, showing great skill and judgment.

Next he digs a small tunnel under the log and passes a heavy chain through it, brings it up over the truck axle and ties the ends together, leaving the chain slack. A strong pole is then cut from the bush and inserted under the slack chain and twisted until very taut, the pole being then lashed to the log by a length of raw-hide. The truck pole, or shaft, is also lashed to the log by another lighter chain.

The bullocks, as many yoke as required, are then manœuvered into line at right-angles from the log. Chains are attached from yoke to yoke and to the far-side wheel of the truck.

When all is ready and secure the driver cracks his long whip, yells excitedly and violently, and the bullocks heave ahead.

Over comes the truck, with the great log lashed to it, with a crash on to its sturdy wheels.

The driver then mounts the log and, by walking back and forth, makes sure that he has it accurately balanced. More chains are passed round axle and log and secured by poles and strips of rawhide. The bullocks are taken to the head of the log with the steadiest yoke as wheelers (attached to the trunk pole), with the others in line ahead, chains connecting yoke to yoke. The driver cracks his whip, shouts and yells, and away goes the whole affair along the path which has been previously cut through the undergrowth until the regular forest track is reached. There it halts until joined by other trucks. When all are ready the troop moves off.

The foremen of *zorras* (as these trucks are called) is always mounted on a powerful mule. A trace of plaited rawhide is attached to a ring on his saddle by means of which assistance is given to the bullocks. These mules are wonderfully sure-footed. By leaning over sideways they exert great force on the trace. They act as wonderful brakes by squatting back on their haunches when going down hill, with the trace secured to the back end of a log.

At some up-gradients the whole troop is halted. Yokes of oxen are detached from some trucks and attached to others, so that as many as eight yoke are sometimes used for hauling each truck up hill in turn.

These bullocks are slow, but very sure. They are stolidly intelligent and understand the strange cries of their driver as to

which way to turn. Their harness consists only of strips of rawhide by which the cleverly shaped wooden yoke is attached to their horns. (The yoke rests on the neck immediately behind the horns, not on the shoulders as in some countries.) A chain from the centre of the yoke acts as trace.

Nothing could be more simple. Nothing but well-greased rawhide would endure the moist heat of this climate. Tanned leather rots very quickly.

Of course there are accidents; all too frequently, alas! Steep down-gradients are the worst, where the huge logs sometimes take charge and rush down-hill until the overturned bullocks are crushed against a tree. The foreman then has to cut the throats of the animals damaged beyond repair.

Fortunately, and strangely, the meat of a hard-worked bullock is quite the sweetest and tenderest, particularly if turned out into good pasture a week or so before killing.

That's enough for to-night. I am stung all over by sand-flies and mosquitoes and doubt if I shall sleep, but must go and try. The heat is terrific. The frogs and insects are singing a more violent chorus than usual. The river is in flood, which is unusual at this time of year, I am told, so apparently there has been heavy rain in the mountains.

It feels as if we may have a thunderstorm here presently.

P.S.—The vultures I have mentioned are nothing like the great condors of the Andes. They are mere gruesome scavengers, whereas the condors seem to spend their entire time soaring and wheeling on outstretched, motionless wings in the high heavens. I see them almost every day, but they never descend into this valley. I suppose they sometimes eat, or do they perhaps live on air and scenery?

Other very common carrion birds here are a kind of eagle, called *caranchos*. They are most handsome, upstanding, fierce-looking creatures, with brown speckled bodies and red and gold heads. Their daring and defiance is preposterous and they will swoop down and snatch a live chicken from almost under one's feet.

APPOINTED SHERIFF. DOG-LOVE. FISHING

No. 27

Miraflones

THE world has changed a lot since I last wrote. Everything for the better, and I am now almost quite happy. We had heavy rain just after I last wrote, and the air cooled immediately.

I made friends with the two dogs, Don and Chila, in the most sudden and unexpected way. I had been warned not to bathe in the river for fear of a most deadly kind of fish, called *piranha*, which come in great shoals and eat all the flesh off one's bones!

Then I had a talk with an old man I saw fishing one day. He told me that no such fish exist in this river. Apparently they live in the larger rivers to the south in great numbers.

Therefore I decided to bathe. I chose a deep pool not far from my house and was thoroughly enjoying it when I espied Don and Chila gazing at me from the bank.

At first I thought they might resent my intrusion in the river where they bathe every day. I called to them and was more than delighted when, for the first time at sound of my voice, they wagged their tails happily. They rushed down the bank and swam out to me and round me, all the time staring at me in the friendliest way.

I swam to the bank with them beside me and found all estrangement departed. Both dogs licked my hands and frolicked around me as happily as any dogs ever did. I was amazed. There seemed to be no reason for it. I believe the silly things had been only acting before and pretending to dislike me, but when they found that I could swim they were unable to conceal their pleasure.

I have discovered that there are fine fish in the river. The old man I saw fishing makes a living by it. He is crippled and not much use for anything else. He had a long bamboo pole with a light rope tied to it, on the end of the rope a length

of fencing wire, and on the wire a hook as thick as a pencil. On the hook was tied the inside of a fowl, very putrid.

He trailed this bait in the muddy river and, as I watched him, hooked an enormous fish, like a great golden salmon, and with a mighty heave on his bamboo pole yanked it out of the river, then stunned it with a club. A most astonishing feat, and the crudest method of fishing I've ever seen. But there is an even cruder method I discovered when I asked him if he ever used artificial bait.

"Only dynamite, in the winter when the river is low and the water clear."

Dynamite struck me as a queer bait, so I asked him how he used it, thinking it might have a pleasant taste to fish.

"Why, we explode a stick of it into the deep pools, where it stuns all the fish it doesn't kill; then we spear them as they float away."

That's his idea of artificial bait!

I hear that in a week or so the water will be clear, then I am going to try a spoon bait on a salmon rod.

I have written to Buenos Aires for the necessary outfit and any instructions concerning how to catch these fish, which are called *dorado*. They inhabit all the rivers in this country I'm told.

My next and most important news is that I have been appointed *Comisario de Policia* for this district.

It is an honorary post. Something between a Sheriff in U.S.A., Magistrate in England, and Lord High Executioner somewhere else. By my commission it seems that I am to try all cases of crime or misdemeanour, take copies of all evidence in triplicate, sentence those who, in my opinion, do not need trial by a higher court and, most exciting, I have authority to shoot anyone who cannot be controlled by other means, and no questions asked.

I have no police, but have been supplied with three rather shabby uniforms, with belts, revolvers and sabres, and Winchester rifles, with which I can equip any men I choose, to act as policemen.

All rather Gilbertian, but I find it has greatly helped my prestige. I also feel honoured, as it is quite unusual for a foreigner to be appointed to such a position, particularly one as young as I am.

I only hope that, in a moment of panic, I don't lose my head and shoot down some silly fellows when they are battling with their knives. It is not impossible, as I get very scared when half a dozen or so of these ruffians start a battle together; they are often too drunk to recognize me when I charge in amongst them and lay about their heads with a heavy stick. I feel very much like shooting them at times, if only to stop the noise they make, which keeps me awake every Saturday night.

You won't believe it, but the only means I have here for detaining prisoners is in the stocks. And a very effective prison it makes. A man on his back with his feet shackled to a stout iron bar, with his heels six inches off the ground, is soon very humble and repentant. Particularly as the stocks are out in the open where everyone can see the occupants.

I made my first use of them last night. Had quite a lot of trouble getting two fellows fixed in them. The man I had appointed as temporary policeman had been so proud of himself in his uniform and weapons that he had celebrated the occasion by getting more drunk than anyone. Fortunately only happily drunk, but it was most unseemly, and very like contempt of law, I thought, that he should have laughed and made silly jokes all the time he and I were arresting and securing our prisoners. Luckily they were not very bad characters: a couple of young *zorberos* who had started a knife fight and wounded each other slightly.

This morning they were both very subdued and repentant, and I liberated them gladly.

I shall have to be very careful in future whom I appoint as constables. A drunken policeman with a loaded revolver and a sabre might be really dangerous.

I have to go to Tucuman next week, to meet Don Diego. An axeman has promised to bring me in a fawn on Saturday, so I am hoping to be able to fulfil my promise.

I am very lonely here, and think, often, how different life would be if I were married. I have an old woman who cooks—very badly—for me and cleans my bungalow. She is rather an old dear and makes all sorts of suggestions about finding a native girl to come and live with me. Says it isn't right that a young man should live alone. She is so candid about it that one

cannot take offence. It is as if she were prescribing a tonic for me and nothing more. There are certainly no young women hereabouts that I would think of sharing a pig-sty with, much less my home.

I often think of Angela and wonder why she hasn't written to me. I wrote to her, with some difficulty. You will understand that it isn't usual for an English gentleman (which is what I am supposed to be) to write to a girl who lives in a thatched hut in a desert, and who has more than a touch of Indian blood. Yet there is something about Angela which convinces me that she has a character of more than usual quality.

This is no place to bring a delicately nurtured English girl. Altogether too rough and wild and unhealthy.

I am perplexed. I feel that I have here the very job I always wanted. Romantic, dangerous, primitive. Freedom to use my initiative with no interference from anyone; not enough interference, I find, as Don Diego doesn't even offer advice. Yet, at times, I feel that this ache for a woman's love is more than I can endure. I shall have to do something about it.

I suppose that English girls have lived in worse places than this, but I should hate to ask one to live here.

Better wait awhile and see if I get a letter from Angela. If she would come to me I feel that I needn't trouble about marriage yet awhile.

All very complicated. Perhaps when I present the fawn next week I shall learn how to solve the problem.

A PROPOSAL. JUNGLE MECHANICS.
S.S. "SWALLOW"

No. 28

Miraflores

YES, the fawn solved my problem; or one-half of it, anyhow.

It was a beautiful little creature, as gentle as—well, there is nothing so gentle as a fawn; and most cuddlesome and affectionate. Not the least bit frightened of any human being.



. . . SAW PHYLLIS ON THE LAWN, CARRIED MY GIFT
PROUDLY AND LAID IT AT HER FEET

I took it to Tucuman and prepared a charming speech to the lovely Phyllis, half implying that I myself had caught the fawn in the depths of the jungle.

I took a cab and drove out to the house, saw Phyllis on the lawn, carried my gift proudly and laid it at her feet. I muttered some silly words about having thought of nothing but her for months, and that her face had haunted me day and night.

I don't know quite what I said, I only know that I felt very much in love with her slim beauty and white skin and fair hair, and felt that I must ask her to marry me.

But I didn't get that far. She looked at me with an amused smile while I talked, then, without warning, opened her mouth and yelled, "Phyllis."

A voice answered from the house and in another moment I realised that I had presented my gift, my heart, and my lies to the wrong twin sister!

There was nothing to be done but laugh. Mother was called and an elder sister. They all joined in the joke against me. They christened the fawn Juan, after me, and were very pleased with it.

I swallowed a whisky and soda and departed as soon as I could. Nothing destroys the sort of love I am suffering from so much as ridicule.

When I got back here I found a letter from Angela—very formal and stilted, beginning "Esteemed Señor"—telling me that her father is dead, and nothing more.

I have written asking her "to allow me to protect her," and offering her the job of cook, housekeeper, and so forth, to my home here.

I am very much alarmed lest she accept, and more so lest she refuse. Probably she will merely ignore my letter. She is a proud creature and I have little reason to think she even likes me, except the memory of her very tender care for me when I was ill at Tacanas.

I have discussed the matter with old Teresa, my cook, who laughed at my doubts.

"Ah, you *gringos* have such ideas about women! Why, what you must do is to go to Tacanas, bundle the girl into a train, using force if necessary; and we like a man who goes

for what he wants; and bring her here and make her work. She won't think anything of you if you talk about morals and that sort of nonsense."

I don't know if she is right or not. She hasn't seen Angela. Anyhow, it would need a much braver man than I am even to think of any "bundling" where she is concerned. She could wither any man with a stare from those strange eyes she has.

In the meantime I am too busy to think about such matters. Only at night, when I am thoroughly tired, I find my sleep disturbed by this feeling of loneliness; a sort of incompleteness, almost as though there is a duty to life which I have neglected.

Perhaps it will all pass off. Possibly just a kind of growing-pain.

Meanwhile I have undertaken a big adventure. As you know, I have not had much experience of machinery. The mechanic here, a very good fellow, has had little more. He did two voyages to Europe as a greaser on a steamer and is interested in machinery, but has had no training whatever.

Then there is the blacksmith, Juan Caturelli by name, an old fellow of about sixty, with the most beautiful blue eyes, iron-grey curly hair and beard, and the physique of a Greek god.

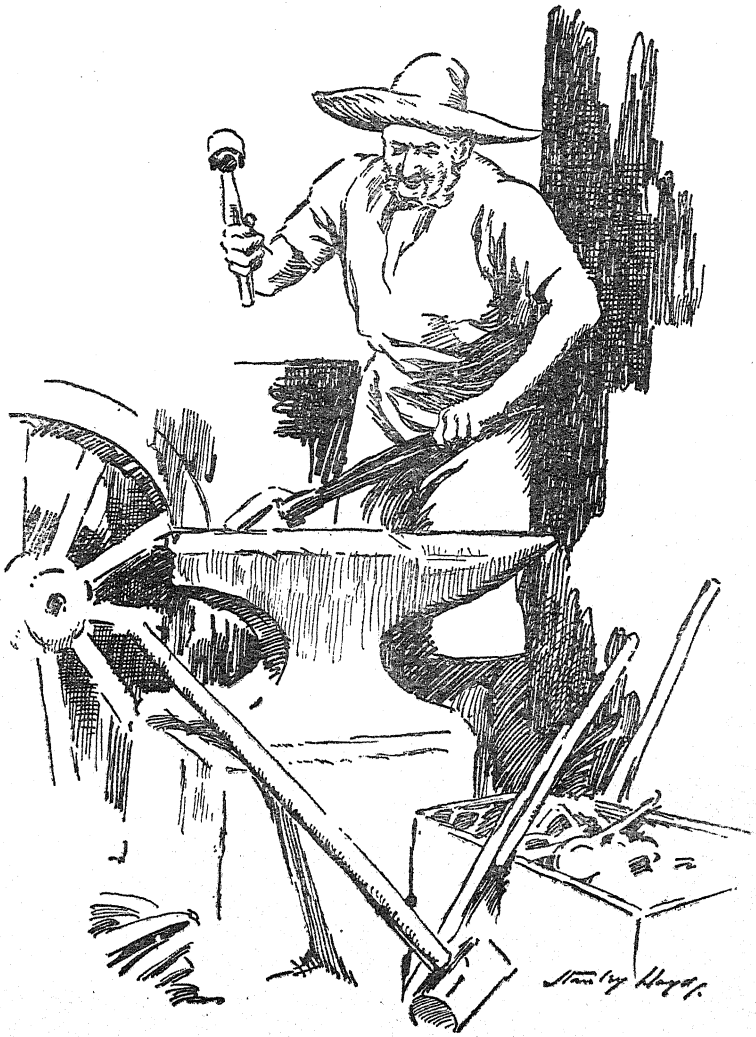
He is Italian by birth, but has spent most of his life in this country. He is a genius at his trade and can do almost anything with iron and steel and fire. He loves his forge, and seems to be quite content to work at it all day and all night.

A week or two ago he came to me with a beautiful smile on his old face, and said that he hadn't enough work to do and that I must find some for him.

"But what can I do, Caturelli?" I replied. "You have mended everything about the place, shod every horse, and sharpened every saw and axe, so that you must just sit about until something breaks, as it must at any moment."

"You will pardon me, Señor, I hope, if I make a suggestion. Could we not cut a number of gate posts of hard wood and let me fit them with hinges and staples and latches and sell them as complete units? They are wanted everywhere and should sell at a good price."

"An excellent idea, Caturelli, but you see that the saw-mill



JUAN CATURELLI, THE BLACKSMITH

is working full time on the contracts in hand. We can't think of any side lines just now."

He smiled politely, but obviously disagreed with me.

"You understand, don't you?" I concluded.

"No, Señor."

"No? Why not?"

"Because the mill is only working a quarter of the time it might."

"But nonsense! It is working every day, Sundays included! What more can we do?"

"Work all night," he replied.

"But we haven't the men. We need skilled men to handle the saw benches."

"Then get them."

"Where?"

"From the emigration office in Buenos Aires, Señor."

By Jove, yes, I had quite forgotten my own arrival in the country amongst the shipload of emigrants. Such shiploads must still be arriving. Amongst them there would surely be skilled sawyers of all nationalities.

"Good for you, Caturelli. I will write—but, wait—will the old engine and boiler stand day and night work? They're not too good, eh?"

"I said just now that we are only working quarter time. Night shifts can only double production."

I stared at him and tried to solve his cryptic remark.

"Why not get the other engine going?" he continued with a comical grin on his face.

Now the saw-mill has an engine on each side of it, coupled to overhead shafting and belts which work the saws. Or I should say, it once had two such engines. One of them is in working order, the other has apparently been abandoned for centuries—actually the mill was only installed five years ago, but in this damp climate everything decays very rapidly. These engines are of a very old-fashioned, vertical-boiler type, with wood slats bound round the boiler with brass bands to retain the heat.

The wood had all rotted away. Rust had attacked every part of the boiler and engine. The steam pipes were rusted

through, the smoke stack had fallen in a crumpled heap. Nothing could have been more hopelessly beyond repair.

I looked into old Caturelli's blue eyes and laughed, rudely, I'm afraid.

He understood my thoughts and his answering smile put me to shame by its courtesy.

"Will you wait there a moment, Señor, please?" he asked.

With that, he strode across to his forge, returning a moment later with a brass plate, black with age and dirt.

"Do you see what that says, Señor?" he enquired as he held out the plate, after cleaning it with a rag.

The brass plate I looked at bore the inscription, "*S.S. Swallow*, Liverpool, 1884," followed by the engine-builder's name and some instructions concerning care and maintenance.

"Englishmen make good engines, Señor. They make them to endure. Isn't that so?"

I stared at the brass plate. Visions of some queer little tug, or perhaps a ferry steamer, in Liverpool Harbour, in the year I was born filled my mind.

To think that this engine had come across the oceans and many hundreds of miles into this jungle struck me as very wonderful.

Immediately, as old Caturelli intended, I was fired with an urgent desire to do anything and everything to bring the poor old wreck to life again.

"Let's go and look at it," I said.

You can imagine my surprise when Caturelli pulled away heaps of pieces of broken plank, rusty scraps of smoke-pipe, and other accumulations of rubbish which almost buried the engine, presently coming to a heap of filthy sacks. Under these sacks were piled all the working parts of the engine, thickly coated with what looked like black mud.

Caturelli took his knife and scraped away some mud from one part and exposed bright, shining steel!

"I put them all there and coated them with grease two years ago," he said quietly. "They are all the parts that are important. The rest of it we can repair ourselves very easily."

The mechanic, Jose Cruzado, came along to see what we were doing. He ridiculed the idea at once, but I soon persuaded him to take an interest, with the result that he and Caturelli

and a few helpers, including myself whenever I can spare time, have now nearly completed the reconstruction of the engine. All day and half the night they worked at it, drilling and riveting steel sheets, running in molten metal bearings, filing, turning and goodness knows what. The boiler is being packed with a coating of some sort of asbestos and cement and a new hard-wood outer casing. The steam pipes have all been renewed and welded. Pressure gauges, safety valves, and such-like have all been carefully kept by Caturelli, though neither he nor any of us know if they are in working order.

By the end of this week we shall be ready for a trial. My inclination is to be far away in the forest whilst steam is being raised, for I think it is very likely that the whole thing will burst. Alas, my status compels me to watch the proceedings from the front row.

I now spend the greater part of each day far up in the forest. I leave here before daylight and arrive at one or other of the camps in time for breakfast.

An old fellow, Julio Lopez by name, who has hitherto been in charge of the pastures in the next valley, is now my guide and general adviser. He knows every part of the forest, is an expert cattleman, and knows a great deal about timber and ways of working it.

He appears to me to be honest and anxious to help me, so I have made him a sort of assistant manager, though he is almost old enough to be my grandfather. He reads and writes quite well, which is far from usual in these wilds.

I am a little dubious yet about telling him of my suspicions of Juan Largo—the fat edition of Long John Silver I told you about—because I plainly see that Largo has immense influence here and is extremely cunning. He has battened on this estate for many years.

The estate has changed ownership many times—owing to the epidemic of land booms and slumps which sweep over this country every few years—but Juan Largo has always been here with his oily tongue to offer advice about everything. His herds of cattle and horses roam the forest in numbers which he alone knows, while his men work on contract for cutting and hauling timber.

He has a marvellous brain; though quite unable to read or write a single word, he knows to an exact cent the state of his account with me.

Considering that he supplies all the meat for the estate at so much per kilo, brings in logs at so much per square metre, and runs cattle in the hills at so much per head, one would imagine that quite an amount of book-keeping would be necessary. Yet he keeps every record in his great fat head, and more accurately than I can do it in my books.

Once or twice his figures have not agreed with mine and on investigation he has proved to be right.

I know now that the contract for the supply of railway sleepers, which existed when I came here, was a complete fraud. The man who was supposed to be buying them was merely an agent for Largo, who was selling them to the Railway Company at a fat profit. I now sell direct to the Railway at nearly double the price of the previous contract. Largo has complimented me on my astuteness in the matter, but he knows that I know all the facts and I can plainly see, for all his oily manner, that he hates me like poison.

I intend to get him and his men and cattle off the estate entirely, but must first make sure which of the men here are loyal to him or in his pay; also I must find out more about the numbers of his cattle.

In a forest country like this it is very difficult to brand all the cattle. There are a great number of almost wild beasts with no brand at all, whose ownership is disputable. Only the *puesteros* (cow-punchers in charge of stations in the hills, whose job it is to watch the herds) know who owns each animal. They ride continually through the forest and watch each calf with its mother so that they know, from year to year, which is which. Whenever possible they lasso and brand the calves, but a great many escape, so that there are a lot of young cattle in the forests which have no brand.

There is continual dispute between my cattlemen and Long John's about the ownership of these animals. I find that I am rapidly making friends with my own employees and that they, or most of them, realize that I am carrying on a sort of tacit warfare with Long John and are anxious to be on my side.

Now the dry season is approaching I am having all the water-holes surrounded by rough fences so that we can trap the cattle and brand them. Though there are numerous streams everywhere, the cattle have a habit of congregating at certain pools, where the streams widen, at more or less regular hours. By means of the fences, and poles for gates, we can trap them all fairly easily.

There will be some exciting times for us all, as Long John is watching the procedure carefully and his men are on the alert. I only hope no serious clashes occur, as these cattlemen are very prone to fighting.

Moreover, there are a number of quite wild young bulls amongst the unbranded cattle. They are very dangerous creatures, yet all the cow-punchers are looking forward to the job of roping and branding them.

I shall sit up in a tree to watch, I expect.

My wish is to turn Long John out of the state entirely, with all his men and animals, as he is causing no end of trouble secretly. He lives a few miles outside this property, on a farm of his own. I find that he is now selling liquor there to my men, at times when our store is closed. They come back fighting-drunk very often and make a disturbance in the camp.

Unfortunately, Don Diego owes Long John quite a lot of money—as he does to a great number of people, I believe—so cannot evict him until he can pay him.

Moreover, we cannot get along without Long John's trucks and bullocks for hauling timber. We haven't nearly enough of our own and there is no one else anywhere from whom we can hire them, or whom we can employ on contract.

Alas, the profit on sales of timber do not come back to the estate. I have to send all monies received to Don Diego. He sends me back only enough for wages and purchases of certain stores.

Otherwise I should soon accumulate enough cash to buy out Long John, or at least pay off his account.

In the meantime I am having to fight him under great handicaps, but rather enjoy it. He has the reputation of being a killer. He always wears a huge revolver and a knife like a broad-sword. With the former he demonstrates his skill to me by shooting buzzards and vultures that come close enough to his butcher's shed while his men are dressing a carcass.

Outwardly we are quite friendly. We greet each other daily with assumed geniality. He reserves all the best joints of meat for me, and makes a lot of ostentation about it. I talk to him about the business of the estate just as if he were an honest friend. Yet we both know that we hate each other. I feel my eyes go queer when I look at his and watch them flinch.

I know I am afraid of him, but being afraid of anything always makes me want to fight it. Whether he is afraid of me I don't know. I can only hope he sees more reason to be so than I do.

MURDER. LOVE REWARDED

No. 29

Miraflores

THIS is going to be a difficult letter to write, but I promised to tell you everything about my life here, so cannot omit or distort the most important and the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me.

Last Sunday afternoon I was sitting in my office struggling with accounts and feeling very lonely and rather depressed. There had been a lot of fighting all the previous night and a man was killed. It happened in the early hours of Sunday morning and I have been quite unable to find out who did it. The victim was one of my best cattlemen, who has been helping me more than anyone else to disentangle the problem of the unmarked cattle, so that I am naturally suspicious about his death. He had evidently been attacked by more than one man and had died fighting, as he had his knife in his hand when found.

While I was working at the accounts, and brooding on the animosity and intrigue which exist here, I suddenly became very excited for no apparent reason.

A sense of some great event about to happen made me jump up from my chair and go out to the veranda to look for the cause of it. There was nothing in sight. The saw-mill was quite deserted, the store was closed, the men were sleeping off the effects of an all-night debauch. Only old Caturelli and

Cruzado, the mechanic, were tinkering with parts of the old engine in the forge.

Their voices, talking quietly, sounded strangely loud in the surrounding silence. The river has subsided and scarcely makes more than a whisper. The insect chorus so fills the air with a continuous trill of sound that it is really more a part of the silence of the forest than any disturbance of it.

I was perplexed. The sense of imminent pleasure grew rapidly, I was embarrassingly aware that it had something to do with my physical loneliness—with love, if you prefer me to put it that way.

I dismissed the silly thought, or tried to, and returned to my desk.

After a moment or so I had a vision of someone crossing the bridge, half a mile away and out of sight. The feeling of excitement increased, so much that I began to think I was delirious; that I had an attack of the bad type of malaria which is prevalent here.

I don't at all believe in telepathy—or I hadn't until that time—so couldn't believe that anyone was approaching by the bridge who might in any way affect my life.

Yet I couldn't take my eyes from where the road from the bridge came round the cliff. I had no idea what I expected to see. I was intensely disappointed when presently appeared a native man and woman riding slowly. The man was, as far as I could see at the distance, a poor type of peon on a poor horse. The woman was mounted, scarcely less badly, and was a lugubrious figure in a black dress, with a black cloth over her head.

They presently disappeared amongst the cluster of little dwellings beyond the saw-mill.

Just another man in search of work, I thought, or possibly relatives of the man who was killed in the morning come to see him buried.

I dismissed them from my mind, and for a short while watched the road to see if anyone else appeared. Nothing further happened. With difficulty I made myself concentrate on my books, yet with a queer sense of excitement all about me.

At six o'clock the old dame who cooks for me arrived from

her hut to prepare my evening meal. She surprised me by opening the door between my dining-room and the office and asking me how I felt.

I stared at the peculiar grin she had on her usually expressionless face.

"Quite well, thank you. Why do you ask?"

"Ah, Don Juan, just anxious to know that you are all right," she replied, looking at me intently and grinning still more.

I suspected she might have been drinking and dismissed her about her work.

She gave me a rather more elaborate meal than usual, staring at me foolishly as she waited on me.

I accused her of having been drinking, which she emphatically denied and almost laughed outright over some mysterious joke of her own.

I was too preoccupied with my own thoughts to pay much attention to her. I ate my dinner, drank a glass of wine, and returned to my office and the books, with the hosts of night-flying insects crashing themselves against the wire gauze doors and windows as they tried to reach the light of my lamp.

The usual Sunday night noise about the store was absent. Apparently the killing of the morning had sobered everyone.

I heard an occasional horseman jog past, and knew that the axemen and cattlemen were going off peacefully and soberly to their camps in the hills, and I wished it could always be so.

I was vaguely disturbed by unusual activity in my dining-room and bedroom. Old Teresa usually goes home as soon as she has cleared my table, leaving me to lonely possession of the bungalow—it is very lonely at times when one cannot sleep.

Now she seemed to be doing a lot of tidying-up and fussing about generally.

I didn't pay much attention; her fussing scarcely intruded on my work. Presently I heard her go home and realized that she was an hour later than usual. I couldn't resist the impulse to look into the next room to see what she had been doing. I was completely bewildered by its trim tidiness, more so when I noticed a bottle of wine on the table and two glasses.

She must really be drunk, I thought, as I returned once more to work.

I had scarcely sat down when I heard her return, walking with slow and uncertain tread, and hesitating outside the dining-room door, which opens on to a space in front of the kitchen.

This was so unusual that I jumped up with the determination to scold her and send her off to her bed.

I flung open the office door, with a reproach on my lips.

What I saw before me, framed in the doorway with the darker night behind and the light of the lamp between, nearly sent me mad with surprise.

My heart stopped. The blood left my face as a sense of fear overwhelmed me. My lips and tongue were suddenly dry, so that I could speak no word of the many which surged through my mind.

There stood Angela: tall, serene and proud, with a strange light in her wonderful eyes and a gentle smile on her lips. She wore a white dress with a lot of lace about it, so that she looked almost ghostly in the lamp-light.

I could utter no more than a gasp. I realized that my face was white, and that my hands trembled, and that I had really no control over myself. I gripped the door handle which I held and continued to stare at the apparition.

She entered slowly. I saw that she also was struggling with emotion. The heavy lashes drooped and hid the fire in her eyes as she came towards me. Her steps faltered slightly and her hands trembled as she reached for my free hand and bowed over it, and muttered a few quiet words of what seemed to be a religious blessing.

At the same time she did a sort of obeisance which conveyed, more eloquently than any words, that she was far from thinking herself a proud and aloof woman with favours to grant, but a weak girl seeking protection and offering her love and service in exchange.

The blood came back to my face in a flood. All about me the world seemed to rush backwards through the ages. The ceaseless chorus of the tropic night rose to a deafening roar in my brain. I was conscious only of eternity and the primeval jungle all about me; a man at the dawn of time alone with his mate.

As long as life lasts I shall not forget the feeling of that warm,

palpitating body in my arms, the flutter of those lips beneath my own, or the fire which glowed below the drooped lashes which vainly tried to hide it.

No legally married man could be happier than I am now. I feel the world is at my feet. There is nothing that I cannot conquer. Fatigue and fear cannot touch me. I am a king, loved by a loyal, lovely and very loving queen, who is more than content to be my servant as well.

And yet, coward that I am, I cannot insist that Angela marries me. I did suggest it to her, but she refused to listen.

"The day will come, *Patron*," she replied quietly, "when you will return to your own people. I am content for a time to be your lover and your servant, if you will permit me to stay by your side."

In my soul I know she is right.

Here in this wild jungle, with all civilization hundreds of miles behind me and thousands of miles of primeval forest around, love and marriage have an altogether different meaning.

P.S.—It appears that old Teresa arranged my "marriage." She wrote to Angela and persuaded her to come to me!

LOVE'S WISDOM

No. 30

Miraflores

HOW different life is now! I seem to have left all boyhood doubts and fears behind at last and to see the real purpose of life in achieving something which will make the world better for one's time in it.

Everything one does all day is measured by that gauge and there seems to be no limit to the good one may be able to do. Failures and disappointments there must always be, but with a loving companion to come home to, with whom to discuss all one's hopes and disappointments instead of having to brood over them alone, the whole aspect of life is changed.

It is incredible that a lovely, uncivilized maiden, with a good deal of savage Indian blood, should be able so to cheer and inspire a man of another race. You won't be able to understand

the situation, I know, but if I tell you that she treats me as if I were some sort of God, and gives me all the unquestioning faith and loyalty which one only expects from the best type of dog, then you, who know and love all dogs, will perhaps understand something of what I feel.

To have one's every wish forestalled, to know that every service one accepts is giving the greatest delight, is a form of flattery which, to anyone but a brute, is tremendously inspiring.

And I get all that from Angela. She is utterly tireless in her efforts to make life easy for me and to please me. She takes great interest in my work and, in the most unobtrusive way possible, gives me very useful hints about the people who work for me. She is, of course, far more able to judge their characters than I am.

A day or two ago, just before daybreak, when I was about to start my day's work, Angela held me to her in a rather strange way.

"Patron," she said quietly, "may I tell you something?" (The word *Patron* is pronounced "Pat-rone," and means "master" or "guardian.")

"Of course you may," I replied, a little surprised by her manner, and a trifle anxious.

"It is difficult and I fear you may be angry with me," she faltered.

"No, my dear, I can't be angry with you. Tell me quickly."

"Well, you know that the people of this country, though wild and savage at times, are really gentle and affectionate, that they love music and laughter and are even sentimental?"

I was very puzzled about these words, particularly as I noticed her breathing rapidly and realized that she was a little afraid or excited about something I couldn't understand.

"Yes," I replied at last, "I know all that. But why do you tell me now?"

"Because you are even more gentle and affectionate really."

"Well, what on earth does that mean?"

She turned her face away from me and hesitated.

"Then why do you, who always smile so gently at me, show such an angry face to all your workpeople and make them fear you?"

You can't imagine the emotions which overwhelmed me as

I heard those gentle words. "Fear you," she said, when all the time I had been assuming as fierce an expression as I could because I was afraid of the men about me.

I felt her hold her breath as she waited for my reply, and knew that she was wondering if she had presumed too far.

I very soon convinced her that she had no reason for anxiety. Then I laughed as I have not laughed for a year or more, kissed her, and stepped out amongst my men into a new world.

The moment they saw me and doffed their hats in their courteous manner, they all paused at their various tasks and their dark faces lit up with smiles. For the first time they saw their master smiling and happy, instead of stern and anxious, and were unable to hide their pleasure. In a moment they were all singing about their work in a way which amazed me. Even the bullocks and mules and horses seemed to be infected by the new atmosphere of happiness.

The saws rang a new and gayer song as they cut into the great logs, and the steam engines also throbbed to a livelier time, it seemed.

That's what might happen to any man if his most faithful dog became articulate and gave him gentle advice. And yet, if we are to believe the Prayer Book, I am living in sin! I begin to see that it was the temptation of such sin that I have been running away from all these years. Now that I have yielded I am happy.

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The old steam engine works! And goes splendidly. It was an exciting moment when we first raised steam and watched the hand of the pressure gauge. I was certain that the whole thing would explode. Old Caturelli had no such fears. He stoked the boiler vigorously, wiped each bit of brass-work carefully with his handful of waste, oiled and re-oiled each bearing, while his blue eyes smilingly regarded the pressure gauge.

At last came the moment for turning the steam cock. He glanced at me inquiringly as he laid his hand on the wheel. I nodded. The men about us stood back a step or two, doubtless feeling what I dare not show, and expecting a violent explosion.

The steam hissed and sputtered. Caturelli gave a slight push on the rim of a flywheel, and away she went: gently at first, and very gradually increasing speed while Caturelli's blue eyes and white teeth flashed pride and satisfaction.

A slight adjustment here and there, the tightening of a bolt or two, and the engine ran as truly and well as the day it was completed. They turned out good stuff in the year I was born!

My difficulty now is to bring in enough timber from the forest to keep the mill supplied. There is no doubt that we need more bullock trucks. I am trying very hard to persuade Don Diego to let me buy some bullocks. We make the trucks here. He replies that he needs all his money for enterprises he has elsewhere. I have a suspicion that he means the roulette or baccarat tables in Buenos Aires, but of course I don't know.

One of our greatest difficulties is in the matter of pasture for the working animals. The dry season has started and for several months to come we shall have no rain or even a cloud in the sky.

As a rule, the beef cattle in the forest do fairly well. They thrive on the thick undergrowth for most of the year. Only occasionally, if the rains come late, do they suffer badly.

The working animals must, of course, be kept in enclosed paddocks so that they may be caught each morning.

There are not enough irrigated paddocks to keep them properly supplied. I will tell you what I am doing about it, as there is an interesting natural history side to the story and quite a lot of humour.

Two or three miles down-river from here there is another flat open space, divided from this valley by a spur of the hills. It is named Agua Verde—meaning "green water"—and contains some three or four hundred acres of flat, fertile land, about fifty of which have been cleared and cultivated.

Each year, about this time, when the river has ceased to flood, a temporary dam is built across the river at the head of this Agua Verde land and the level of water raised so that a stream runs into an irrigation ditch, without which no cultivated crops would survive the dry winter season. Particularly is this so in the case of lucerne, which is the staple food for our working animals.

At the upper end of the land is a huge colony of *biscachas*, or prairie dogs, about the size of badgers. They live in burrows, which they share with multitudes of small owls and snakes, apparently in perfect harmony.

This colony consists of over two acres of burrows and mounds. There must be hundreds of *biscachas* there which emerge every night and destroy a large part of the maize and lucerne crops.



BISCACHAS

By day one occasionally sees one or two of the queer creatures sitting upright at the entrance to their maze of burrowed galleries, looking rather like small bears. At night the land is alive with them.

Old Julio Lopez, who is now my assistant manager, has lived at Agua Verde all his life. He hates those *biscachas* with a morose and deadly hatred; the hatred of a vanquished enemy for his conqueror.

He says that it is quite impossible to cultivate any more land because of them. Already it has been necessary to clear forest and plant crops farther away from them, but with little effect as they don't mind walking half a mile or so for their nightly meal.

The result is that a hundred acres of the best land at the head of the valley is barren and useless.

One day I made a primitive theodolite, with a common spirit-level and a few sticks, by which I found that I can make water flow from the river right into the highest part of the *biscacha* colony.

The natives eat the creatures and make use of their skins, but owing to their nocturnal habits and quick hearing they are very hard to shoot. Traps are laid, but are seldom effective.

I proposed that we should dig a trench from the dam to the colony, surround the latter with men armed with sticks, and all their dogs, then flood the burrows and destroy the *biscachas* as they bolt.

Every man on the place took the idea with enthusiasm. They all love sport—that is to say, the killing of animals—and thought this a great game: so much so, that last Sunday over fifty of them rode down to Agua Verde with spades and began the digging of the ditch. The only pay they got for it was free beer and wine, which I provided.

They want to complete the job to-morrow, Saturday, and enjoy the day's slaughter on Sunday.

The humour of the situation is that, in the hope of sport, an irrigation ditch two hundred yards long is being dug at the cost of a few gallons of wine and beer. Nobody has yet tumbled to the fact that the ditch is for the dual purpose of flooding out the *biscachas* and then irrigating the land all round.

In the ordinary way all these men hate digging and have to be paid a lot to make them dig. Strange what sport will do!

SPORT WITH PRAIRIE DOGS

No. 31

Miraflores

WHAT a day! Never have I seen such killing. Two hundred *biscachas*, almost as many snakes, two dogs, and very nearly myself.

At dawn this morning the water was turned into the new ditch. My theodolite, though crude, hadn't failed me. Slowly

the water ran along the ditch to the blocked end by the *biscachera*, as the colony is called. As the men arrived from the camp, I made them pile more sods on the main dam in the river so that there should be a greater flow of water.

By nine o'clock all was ready. All the men from the camp, strangely sober for a Sunday morning, and many women, about two hundred altogether, surrounded the colony and the water was turned into the burrows.

The cattlemen had all brought their dogs, so that we had about forty of them, including Don and Chila, the latter hysterical with excitement, as she always is when there is any killing to be done. Obviously she knew what we were about to do. That and the smell of the *biscachas* and the presence of all the other dogs made her quite frantic, despite the fact that she is shortly expecting a litter of pups.

For an hour nothing happened. The water flowed away into the underground galleries and was lost. Not a *biscacha* showed his face. Only a couple of little owls flew out and away to prove to us that something was happening underground.

Then the water stopped flowing as the ditch emptied itself. I galloped to the dam and saw that the top layer of sods had washed away. It was difficult to persuade any men to leave the chance of the first kill to go and repair it.

Never have I seen men work so fast as they did at repairing the dam. In half an hour they were running along the ditch with the new flow of water—now double the volume—so as to reach the *biscachera* with it.

Not till nearly midday did the fun begin. Everyone was watching the numerous holes. Almost simultaneously they all cried out they had seen *biscachas* looking out and that they had disappeared again.

Chila and some of the smaller dogs had seen them and were diving into the burrows after them and emerging all wet and muddy.

Suddenly there was a big subsidence in the centre of the colony; some of the main galleries must have collapsed as the water flooded them.

In a moment there was pandemonium. From all sides the *biscachas* bolted. Men yelled as they struck right and left, with

their heavy sticks at the bewildered and muddy creatures. Dogs screamed as they chased and killed fugitives. Revolvers cracked, guns blazed, women laughed and cried out and pointed.

Men leapt on horses and galloped after the few who got away. The ground everywhere was littered with corpses in a few minutes. The whole colony was flooded. The mounds collapsed everywhere, and water oozed out in fifty places. There was a pause and it looked as if the destruction was complete.

Only then did we see the snakes; thousands of them, all about us, including rattlers and the deadly coral snakes. Again the sticks thrashed and thudded for a new killing.

Suddenly old Don, the St. Bernard, bayed softly and drew my attention to an earth not yet flooded. With a shock, I realized what he was trying to tell me. Chila was in there, trapped by a fall of earth. I leapt to the spot. Little Chila had become very dear to me. I couldn't bear the thought of her drowning because of her courage. I laid my head to the ground and faintly heard her whining and digging.

As I did so, I saw a snake bite a dog close beside me. The dog yelped, then immediately staggered drunkenly, vomited, quivered, and fell over dead. It was almost as if it had been shot, so sudden was its end.

Only a few minutes later did I realize what I had seen, for as I watched I was plunging my arm into the burrow and digging away handfuls of soil to get through to Chila.

After a minute or so I felt her feet digging feebly, as the trapped water ran over my arm. As I grabbed a foot and pulled, a rush of water and snakes flooded out and filled the hole.

Chila was saved and, though nearly drowned, was unharmed.

As for me, I nearly fainted. The realization of what those snakes might have done and the feel of their loathsome bodies against my naked arm made me feel quite sick. Apparently they were too busy trying to save themselves from drowning to remember that they could bite.

So there we are, a hundred acres of rich land ready for the plough to-morrow, cleared of *biscachas* for good, I hope (it was the only colony anywhere on this estate), and with an irrigation ditch dug by which it can all be watered.



I WAS PLUNGING MY ARM INTO THE BURROW

Not a bad day's work—or play? You may think the whole affair very brutal, but remember that these *biscachas* are little better than enormous rats and just as destructive.

LUMBER WORK. MORE SPORT

No. 32

Miraflores

THE problem of keeping the mill supplied with timber has become acute.

I can sell every inch of the stuff we cut, at good prices, and if only I could keep some of our profits for the purchase of bullocks we could rapidly increase our trade. Unfortunately the owner has serious commitments elsewhere, and is for ever asking for more produce from me, while not supplying the necessary equipment.

The only thing I can do is to concentrate on the better quality or higher-priced timbers and neglect less profitable lines, such as railway sleepers.

There is magnificent cedar in some parts of the forest, but most of it too far away to be profitably cut. Also, it favours the moist valleys, where the ground is so soft that it is impossible to haul logs weighing up to four tons each without making roads; not roads as you know them, but what are called corduroy tracks, consisting of branches laid across the track and covered with brushwood and earth: very rough going for the bullocks, but enough to prevent the truck wheels from sinking into the ground.

Amidst the very rugged contours of these hills there are innumerable deep valleys which have never been explored, many of them almost inaccessible because of jungle undergrowth.

Day after day now I ride through the forest with three men, armed with *machetes* (jungle knives like cutlasses), hacking away the undergrowth and the lianas which trail from every branch, seeking new groves of the precious cedar and surveying possible roads for the trucks.

I have been only moderately successful so far. Several old

hands tell me of a wonderful grove of tall cedars which exists somewhere not too far away, which has never been cut because of the steep hills which surround it.

It is supposed to exist within six miles of the mill in a northeasterly direction. Two men say they have actually seen it, but are quite unable to lead me to it. You will hardly understand how that can be so, unless you visualize a country of extremely steep hills and valleys, choked everywhere with a mass of tangled creepers and undergrowth, through which it is impossible to pass without hacking and slashing an opening.

There are regular narrow paths in all directions, made by cattle and wild game, and kept more or less clear by their feeding on the leaves. But all valuable timber near those tracks has been long since cut. It is only by searching deeper into the jungle that new sources of supply can be found.

It is very interesting and exciting work, and I should enjoy every moment of it but for the black cloud of mosquitoes which never leaves us. Mosquitoes and other stinging insects are the curse of the place. They interfere with everything one does at all times. Indoors one can only exclude them by almost excluding all air, damn them!

We carry Winchester rifles with us on our expeditions and have shot a lot of buck and a couple of bush pigs. I am hoping to get a jaguar or a tapir presently. I have been shown their fresh tracks once or twice, but in such jungle it is almost impossible to come up with them. My friends, the mosquitoes, prohibit all thought of hiding oneself and waiting for a shot at big game. I should be insane in five minutes if I had to keep still in the jungle.

As I write there is a host of mosquitoes whining all about me. Many of them are anopheles, the malaria carriers. They are black and white striped, and stand on their heads to sting.

There are two lakes on this estate. One, far away on the eastern boundary, is a shallow swamp on the edge of a very wide plain, which stretches away to the horizon and goodness knows where. This lake is choked with tall reeds and is alive with duck, geese, flamingo, and dozens of other varieties of bird.

I shot a goose and a brace of duck there recently. The men

with me at once lit a big fire, then dug wet clay from the swamp, in which they packed the ducks, feathers, innards and all, and put the whole thing into the heart of the fire. We rode on and did some more surveying and returned to the fire an hour or more later for lunch.

The balls of clay were baked hard. A crack with a whip handle broke them open to show beautifully cooked and plucked ducks. The feathers had come away with the baked clay as clean as a whistle. A deft cut with a knife removed the entrails, which were apparently dried up, then we broke up the birds with our fingers and enjoyed a delicious meal.

The men told me that unless one cooks these birds immediately they are killed—before they have time to stiffen—they are so tough as to be uneatable. They said I should find the same with the goose, which was very fat when shot. They were quite right. Angela could only make some tasty soup out of it.

I suppose if one could hang the birds for some days they would be all right, but that is quite impossible in this climate.

This morning I participated in fishing by dynamite—and a horrid business it is. My rods haven't arrived yet, so I have been fishing with one of the native's bamboo poles. I have caught several large, sluggish fish, called *bagre*, at night by the light of a hurricane lamp, which attracts them; a sort of mud fish, with long antennæ hanging from their lower jaws. Some of them weigh ten pounds or so and are quite good eating when cut into steaks, like cod. They are so sluggish that it is difficult to know when they are hooked. We use bits of meat for bait, which they swallow with the hook, and then apparently go to sleep.

I want to catch the huge *dorado*, which are violent fighters, I hear, and very good eating. The trouble is that their mouths are a mass of teeth, so that one has to use a very stout wire trace, which is too visible in clear water. I am going to try in some rapids a mile up-river, where the broken water may hide the wire.

The dynamite trick is mere slaughter and would soon kill every fish in the river. I should like to prohibit it entirely, and would if I could find an alternative way of getting enough fish for the people here, who have every right to expect such a

welcome addition to their diet. Netting is practised, but is not very successful. Long nets cannot be used because the river bed is too full of tree roots and whole trees which wash down every year in the flood season and get stuck in the mud. The nets used are circular affairs, about eight feet in diameter, weighted on the edge, which are thrown into clear patches of water and require great skill to use. With dynamite a dozen men can get several hundred pounds of fish in half an hour with no trouble at all. A stick of dynamite, like a fat, pink candle, is fitted with a detonator and a length of waterproof fuse. The fuse is lighted from a cigarette and the dynamite stick flung into a deep pool, where it presently explodes with a dull thud. A row of men stands in the shallows below the pool, armed with barbed spears. Directly after the explosion numbers of fish, from *dorado*, weighing as much as sixty or eighty pounds, down to minnows, come to the surface, either dead or stunned, and float down-stream to be speared by the waiting men.

It is, no doubt, a quick way of getting food, but there were thousands of young fish killed by each explosion this morning, which struck me as being absurdly wasteful.

We had one very good laugh out of the proceedings, which compensated for quite a lot.

Apparently our fuse was damp or defective, so that our first two sticks of dynamite did not explode and were wasted. Then Juan Largo came along, mounted on one of his splendid mules, to watch us, accompanied by two of his men and a number of dogs. He is a Nosey Parker person, who has to be in everything. He watched us try a third throw with the same negative result. He at once dismounted and, in his know-all officiousness, criticized our methods. The fuse was too long, it was not properly lit, etc., etc. He proceeded to show us how it should be done.

I admit that he was braver than I was in the short fuse he used, and the way he put his cigarette to it and then blew on it, so that it sputtered sparks, before flinging the dynamite into the pool. I half expected to see him blown to bits, and I very nearly did.

No sooner had he flung the bomb into the water than one of

his dogs, apparently trained to retrieve, dived in after it. I hardly noticed what had happened until I saw the enormous fat figure of Juan Largo running like a mad elephant towards the bush. Then everyone else did likewise, myself included, but not in the same direction as Long John, for it was his dog and if it caught the dynamite it would carry it to its master.

Fortunately, perhaps, the dog did not find the bomb, which also failed to explode.

We all had a great laugh at fat Juan Largo, who looked very ridiculous as he presently emerged from hiding and rode off.

I sent the storekeeper for a fresh coil of fuse, which cured our trouble, and in two hours we had a couple of hundred-weight of grand fish.

Alas, the occasion is now being celebrated with a more than usually riotous orgy of drinking. As I write I can hear angry shouting from the village and know that at any moment I shall hear the knives ringing and the women screaming, and be obliged to go down and lay about with a stick, also perhaps to bandage up some bad wounds.

I cannot get any reliable men to take on the job of policemen. Apparently it makes them unpopular with their fellows. Either I must bring in an outsider or two as permanent police, or I must do all the police work myself. I can always find enough sober and reliable men to lend me a hand with troublesome prisoners, but they object to dressing up as police, no matter how much pay I offer them. Only drunken, useless fellows want the job, for the money, which they promptly mortgage for drink and become a menace.

It is quite impossible to control drinking here. I put on all sorts of restrictions at first, with the result that the men rode off across the river, outside my jurisdiction, and bought any quantity of fiery and inferior spirits which they brought back and drank here, meanwhile reviling me loudly for my restrictions. I had perhaps more trouble, while others got the profit on the drink.

I have a strong suspicion that Long John sells drink illicitly to the men here. On Saturday nights there is a lot of coming and going across the bridge, and it is quite impossible to know what is brought in.



JUAN LARGO RUNNING LIKE A MAD ELEPHANT

There is a horrible spirit called *aguardiente* which the men drink. It is a fiery white spirit, distilled from maize, I believe, and practically pure alcohol. Men get fighting drunk on it very quickly and seem to drink it for no other purpose.

Ah! There go the knives. I must investigate.

JUNGLE ENTERPRISES. OIL

No. 33

Miraflores

DO you remember how, when I was working in the arid plain at Tacanas, I told you that I longed for the mountains and was determined to get there amongst their lofty peaks and deep valleys?

Well, here I am, deep in a valley amidst the ranges. Yet all sense of the immensity of mountains is lost. One sees no mountains, except on very rare occasions the glimpse of a peak or two above the tree tops. Everything is shut in by dense forest. There is no air and very little light in the interminable jungle. I feel suffocated and imprisoned, so that I almost long for the wide space of the plains, with the mountain ranges just a beautiful and mysterious vision far away in the sky.

Don Diego was here for a couple of days last week. He was in a rather anxious state about finance, and seems to be in some kind of difficulty; wants me to increase enormously my output of timber, but cannot supply the money for purchase of more bullock trucks.

He rode with me to see some of the new groves of cedar I have found so that he may promise his creditors, or the banks or somebody, early deliveries.

He was full of enterprising schemes and talked away, in his abrupt, incisive voice, about vast new projects, just as if he had unlimited capital at his disposal.

Our road took us through several of the strange groves of wild orange trees which exist here. Their fragrance, with



A HERD OF WILD PIG CROSSED OUR PATH

blossom, rotting leaves, ripe and unripe fruit, and a mass of rotting fruit on the ground, is really wonderful. Nothing grows under these groves of fifty or so trees. Their branches meet overhead, so that one has the impression of being in a darkened and heavily-scented room as one halts in the clear space and stares at the jungle surrounding and thrusting close on every side.

"Just look at the money going to waste here," snapped Don Diego. "What a quantity of marmalade might be made from these oranges if we set up a factory. We could supply all the English people in the Argentine at a fine profit. And do you know what is made from the leaves of wild orange trees?"

"No," I replied, crumpling some in my hand and marvelling at their scent.

"Eau de Cologne, of course. There are enough trees here to supply a big factory. What quantity of Eau de Cologne do you think is imported every year?"

"I haven't an idea."

"Neither have I, but it must be enormous. I must go into the matter myself."

A hint, I suppose, that I should have established a scent factory long ago if I had half his energy.

A herd of wild pig crossed our path a moment later, as we rode on, and gave him something else to think of as he blazed away with his revolver at the dense bush into which the pig disappeared.

I expected him to say that we should start a bacon factory, but he only said that he was convinced that several pig had been hit and that, if we had time, we might recover their bodies.

I think he knew well that he had hit none!

We rode on through the dark and silent forest, sometimes with a roof of dense leafy branches a hundred feet overhead, above which unseen flocks of parrots screamed in the sun which could not penetrate it.

Occasionally we turned aside from the main track, and, in single file, rode through recent cuttings to inspect cedar groves and to plan the best method of hauling out the logs. Don Diego talked grandly of steam winches and great wire cables slung from surrounding trees by which logs might be hauled

out of the deep gullies to the track. He apparently thought that I should have a stock of steam winches and wire cables available at any moment.

Presently his whole manner changed and he became a jolly boy instead of an anxious business man.

"Let's go and see the *laguna*," he cried while we were inspecting one of the drinking-places I had enclosed. "It must be quite near here. I should love to see it again."

He was speaking of the lake in the hills, a peculiar place where a landslide has, many years ago, closed one end of a very deep S-shaped valley, trapping the stream which ran through it and forming a deep lake about half a mile long by a hundred yards wide.

It was a sheer waste of time to go there, as it is very inaccessible. It meant riding for several miles up the stony bed of a stream, then leaving the horses and climbing over very rough boulders for a few hundred feet. The lake is very beautiful: one side of it a precipitous jungle-covered mountain, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of feet high. The other side is solid stone, like black granite, with the largest pieces of smooth rock I have ever seen; some of them as big as a large house.

The *vaquiano*, or guide, who rode with us confirmed that we were then beside the overflow stream and that an hour's riding up its bed would bring us to the lake.

"But there is much more I want to show you," I suggested. "Hadn't we better leave the lake for another time?"

"No, let's go there now," declared my boss emphatically, smacking his thick neck to kill a mosquito. He turned his horse into the stream and spurred it ahead.

It took us two valuable hours to reach the foot of the approach to the lake. The ride up the bed of the stream, with thick jungle on either side and with enormous maidenhair ferns growing thick on the rocky banks, was very rough going but very beautiful, until we came to where the stream bed was too steep for riding. Humming birds of every size, shape and colour flashed and hovered about us all the way. Evidently they like the moisture by the stream. A sweating half-hour of climbing over boulders brought us to the still and rather mysterious stretch of water lying in its deep gorge.

"The day will come when crowds of people will come to bathe here," said Don Diego, "when this estate has been developed properly and is fully inhabited."

I contemplated my failure to develop it properly hitherto, then had a happy thought.

"What about building up the overflow and trapping a lot more water? There must be millions of gallons here now. By damming a dozen feet higher at this end we could make a reservoir big enough to supply the countryside for years."

He looked at me with a rather pitying grin for a moment.

"Do you think I haven't planned all that long ago, my lad? You can't tell me anything of the possibilities of this place. Why, it's a gold mine—in the right hands."

I knew, however, by the way he studied the lie of the land, that the idea was quite new to him; but, in any case, it will be a quite impracticable scheme for the present.

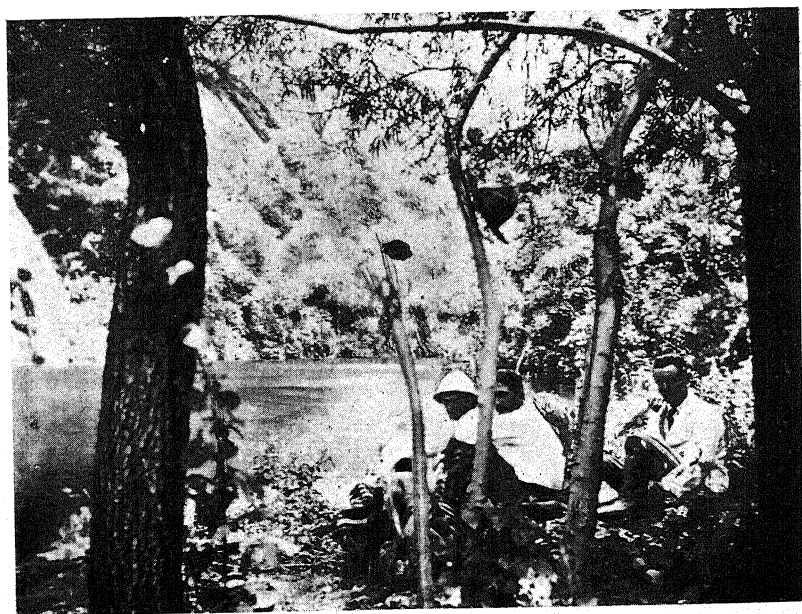
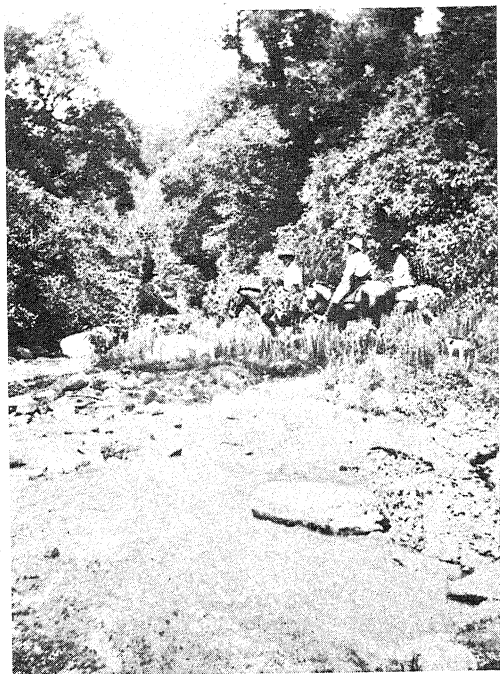
There wasn't much to see at the lake. It lay too deep in its narrow gorge for any wind to ruffle its surface. No birds or beasts inhabited its precipitous shores. No fish swam in its black depths. It was as dead and silent as though all life had departed from the world, or had never begun. Only mosquitoes lived about us and intruded their thin whine upon the rather gloomy thoughts which filled our minds as we stood and waited for something, we didn't know what, to disturb the strangely still surface of the lake.

"Come on. Let's get away from this place," exclaimed the boss impatiently. "It gives me the horrors. Something wrong with it, but I don't know what."

With his usual brisk vigour he began the descent over the tumbled boulders, with the stream trickling between them.

Presently we remounted our horses, and instructed our guides to lead us to a spot I had once seen, the only such place anywhere in the estate, where one could stand on a little rocky eminence and gaze across the tops of the trees for miles and miles. Everywhere else here is so surrounded by forest that one can never get any sort of view. Only by the marshy lake can one gaze across a few miles of flat, swampy land. At Agua Verde one can just see the summit of far mountains over the top of the

FOREST SCENE,
MIRAFLORES.



THE LAKE IN THE MOUNTAINS OF MIRAFLORES.



OIL WELL BORING OUTFIT IN COURSE OF ERECTION AT
MIRAFLORES.



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE LAKE AT MIRAFLORES.

nearer forest. It all gives one a sensation of imprisonment, which is rather depressing.

We decided to get to the eminence I had spoken of and there, while enjoying the view to the southward across miles of jungle, cook and eat our lunch.

We had brought some meat with us, which our men would grill over an open fire, in the usual cowboy fashion.

It was two o'clock when we reached the little plateau. An overhanging rock gave us shade from the fierce sun. We were glad to sit with our backs against it while, a few feet away, our men prepared our meal.

The plateau was only about fifty feet long and wide, with a low cliff on the higher side and the tops of the trees growing level with the lower side.

Our men soon had a fire going, and the smell of meat grilling over the embers was grand.

Rather interesting how these fellows work: they make a huge fire of branches which flames vigorously for a few minutes and very soon makes a heap of hot ashes, over which the meat is grilled on the end of a sharpened stick. The fire is kept going by piling on more fuel to one side, whence the hot ashes are raked as required.

The midday meal of the *gauchos* consists of nothing but meat. Sometimes they will eat a little bread with it, but no vegetables or other such frillings.

Morning and evening they drink a lot of *maté*—a tea made from some sort of herb which grows hereabouts. It is most invigorating and sustaining and apparently supplies all the necessary vegetable juices for good health. I am astounded by the quantity of meat these fellows eat at the one real meal a day which they seem to think necessary. I should say that a pound and a half to two pounds is quite usual for each man. Yet they can go for days with nothing more than their *maté* and show no signs of weakness. Rather like wild animals, I think: alternate gorge and starvation. Yet they are as strong and healthy as possible.

After lunch, Don Diego and I lay down for a siesta. The smoke from the fire—which was burning against the cliff face—kept away the mosquitoes and made sleep possible. I woke

to find Don Diego shaking me violently. He was angry with excitement, and very soon had me interested when I saw that the soft, dark grey rock above the fire was emitting little sputtering flames.

"Do you know what that means, my boy? Talk English so that these fellows shan't hear."

"No, I can't say I do."

"Why, fortune of course. An immense fortune, if I'm not mistaken. That's oil you're looking at—crude petroleum oil." He yelled the words at me as though I were a hundred yards away. I was very sleepy and perhaps unable to grasp the full meaning of his words. No doubt I looked blank and foolish.

"Haven't you got any imagination, my lad? Doesn't it interest you that your fortune is made? That you'll be a very rich man?"

At that I woke up completely, for his words implied that I should share in whatever good fortune he had discovered.

I studied the little jets of flame carefully, and broke off a bit of the soft rock and smelt it with what I hoped was a knowing expression, though I knew nothing about geology or oil.

"M'yes, looks like the real thing," I ventured non-committally.

Don Diego was busy filling saddle-bags with bits of the rock.

"What real thing?" he snapped.

He dislikes speaking English, though his accent is perfect. It always seems to make him irritable for some reason.

"Oil," I replied, though without conviction.

"No, it isn't. That's merely oil-bearing shale. What it means is that there is oil very near here, vast quantities of it probably. I must get away to Buenos Aires to-night, float a big company, and begin boring for oil immediately. You will have to take charge and I'll give you a commission on the profits. What about ten per cent.? There may be millions in it."

He interprets everything in percentages like that. Ten per cent. of even one million seemed all right to me, though he didn't say if he meant pesos or pounds. Anyhow, I was by now as enthusiastic as he was and accepted gladly, leaving all details till later.

On the face of it I didn't see any immediate prospect or

wealth. This hill, remote in the jungle and days' journey from a railway or even a road, struck me as a poor place in which to start an oil well with any hope of profit.

Don Diego was busily beating out the flames on the cliff, meanwhile swearing me to utmost secrecy about our discovery. Then we all mounted our horses and, urged to utmost haste, rode down through the jungle.

Rather alarming to ride fast down these steep tracks, often little more than the beds of streams, and full of rocks and loose stones. One expects every moment that one's horse will stumble and roll over. Often they slip and then squat down on their behinds and slide. I have learned a trick from the *gauchos* of taking one's feet out of the stirrups so that if the horse should fall forwards one slips off over his head and avoids being rolled on. The deep-seated saddles we all use here are easy to sit at all angles.

As soon as we got home Don Diego packed his bag and departed for Buenos Aires, bursting with optimistic enthusiasm and full of vast plans for the future.

In the meantime he has warned me that he is very short of ready money and that I must economize everywhere, so let us hope that we really have "struck oil."

FISHING FOR DORADO

No. 34

Miraflores

YESTERDAY was a holiday once more, and for me a wonderful day.

I sent to Buenos Aires some time ago for some rods and gear suitable for the big *dorado*, the great golden salmon in this river. They duly arrived and caused much fun amongst the local fishermen.

"You'll never catch anything bigger than a minnow on those little canes, *Patron*," they declared when they saw me assemble a rod and try its action. "Why, a *dorado* would break that in

half in a second, and as for this thin line, it might as well be cobweb for all the use it will be."

"You wait and see, my lads," I replied, feeling that they were probably right, but determined to prove them wrong if I possibly could.

Amongst the gear was an assortment of spoons and artificial minnows, also some double hooks with a safety-pin attachment on the shank, and instructions to say that a live minnow impaled on the safety hook was a certain bait.

The shallow backwaters of the river are just now full of vast shoals of minnows. We got some buckets and were able to catch a bucketful in no time.

A few minutes later I had learned the trick of fixing a minnow to the hook and, choosing a likely spot in broken water below a rapid, made my first cast.

The bait had scarcely disappeared when terrific things happened. I was fumbling with the line and reel to see how it all worked, when, with a scream of the reel, the line was torn from my fingers at a thousand miles an hour. I couldn't think what had happened. The idea that I was on to a fish so soon seemed incredible to me, and, I think, to those who watched me. Yet the speed of the river couldn't account for a fraction of the speed at which the line had run out.

Suddenly it slackened and a yell from an onlooker and a pointed hand showed me, fifty yards down-stream, a huge fish falling back into the water after a leap which must have been four or five feet in the air.

"You've got him, *Patron*," yelled everyone. "He had the line in his mouth. Pull, pull!"

I knew better than that, and managed to keep my head, though I was shaking with excitement.

I reeled in rapidly on the slack line, waiting for the second rush which I knew would happen. Then I flinched as a gleaming, golden projectile, a yard long, flashed out of the water within ten feet of where I was standing. For a second it seemed to hang poised, four feet above the water, while it twisted and lashed in the air, with the sun gleaming on a million points of golden light and on the water which was flung from it.

Imagine my astonishment when I saw that my line was



FLASHED OUT OF THE WATER WITHIN TEN FEET
OF WHERE I WAS STANDING

hanging from the creature's jaws. It was incredible that the line I reeled in so frantically and which trailed away downstream, far beyond this giant fish, could still be intact.

I was convinced that it was broken and was winding in more slowly when away it went again from my quivering fingers, straight downstream, with the reel shrieking. A full hundred yards had run out at terrific speed before it again slackened. I wound in hopelessly as fast as I could, realizing that I should require a reel four times as big if I hoped to recover such a length of line in time for the next rush.

But there was no need for my anxiety. The line came in steadily until I felt that the golden monster was still fast and lurking, sulking, thinking, in some deep hole about forty yards down stream. Very gently I tried to persuade him out and was rewarded with a snatch at the line, as angry and determined as if I had a mad dog at the end of it.

There was nothing to do but wait. I knew the fish wouldn't stay still for long.

Right! Away he went again down stream, then across and across, with my line making queer little cascades as it traversed the current. Then out leaped the fish once more, and again, and again, almost on the same spot, like a bucking horse. I wound in and let out, as the brute tore up and down stream without any sign of tiring, for perhaps a quarter of an hour.

I was thoroughly exhausted with fatigue and excitement, and perhaps not a little anxious lest the creature should realize that I was the cause of its anguish and leap out of the water at my throat. I had the feeling that a ferocious tiger was on my line instead of a fish.

Then, as once more my palsied fingers wound the reel, it came to a dead stop. I realized at once that no fish could be the cause of the solid dead-weight on the line.

I pulled and jerked and then stumbled down, over the rock-strewn river bank, winding in the line as I went until I came abreast of whatever held it. Deep under the water I could see the outline of a great tree root or branch around which my line was obviously caught.

There was no hope of getting my fish now. One pull of

his mighty strength against such an obstruction must have snapped the line like a cobweb.

Nothing to do but cut it and try again.

Quickly I bent on a new line with wire trace and hook, baited with a live minnow, and cast it into the rapids.

I was determined now to be more skilful and less lenient if I got on to another fish. I braked the reel. . . .

Bang! Away went the line, straight down-stream as before, but not quite so fast. The same wild leaps and struggles, but I was more alert and more resistant. It took twenty minutes before I definitely saw signs of fatigue in my opponent; saw him roll heavily instead of leaping and was able to check his mad rushes. Slowly, but persistently, I forced him to give ground until at last I had him close in to a little sandy beach, where my excited helpers stood ready with the gaff.

I collapsed, shaking like a jelly, as soon as I saw that great fish safely on dry land. Sweat ran into my eyes in torrents. My mouth felt like hot sand-paper. My fingers ached most painfully from their violent efforts. My knees wobbled foolishly as I made the few steps to where my defeated foe lay gasping.

Bright gold he was, but the strength of the creature's shape was far more striking than his colour; deep bodied, with a tail like a great spade; his head blunt and beautifully formed for strength and speed, with a vast steel-lipped mouth lined with rows of the neatest and sharpest little teeth, hundreds of them, capable of taking clean off any careless fingers that might get between them.

Twenty-eight kilos he weighed, which is roughly fifty-six pounds, or a bit more, I believe.

So I've proved to these local fishermen that my little fishing rods can catch big fish when the river is low. They are all very excited and anxious to try their skill. In fact two of them have already lost a line each and have now got a gang of helpers to dive down and attach ropes to the many old trees that foul the deep pool and they are hauling them out on to the bank.

So I am looking forward to great sport.

The *dorado* was grand to eat.

MUTINY AND MURDER

No. 35

Miraflores

SO much has been happening lately that I doubt if I shall be able to tell you half of it. I am lucky to be here at all after what was, apparently, an attempt on my life.

For some weeks past I have had great difficulty in getting Don Diego to send me enough money for paying the men here. He collects all the cash for the timber I send to Buenos Aires. What little I sell locally doesn't pay a fraction of the wages.

Moreover, all the supplies for the stores are sent from Buenos Aires. They also have failed to arrive.

Last Saturday there was no money at all and the men were very angry. I told them that I had telegraphed to Don Diego, that I had no money myself, and that we should all have to wait. I gave them credit notes on the store for necessities, but that didn't appease them at all.

By some means they got hold of a lot of liquor on Saturday night. I have a strong suspicion that Long John supplied it to them. I heard them rioting until daylight on Sunday morning. By breakfast-time everything was suspiciously quiet, with something sinister in the air.

The saw-mill was working at an urgent order. The sawyers are now quite a steady team and keep sober when I tell them they are especially needed.

About eleven o'clock I was walking back through the logs from the mill to my little bungalow when the shock came.

I had noticed that a dozen or so men, axemen and truck drivers, had collected amongst the logs. I imagined they were waiting to argue some more about the matter of their wages. They were very quiet and did not cause me any particular anxiety, though I knew I should have difficulty in dispersing them. Sunday morning is usually a time of much noise and drinking and gambling around the store. Having no money must have made them very savage.

I was half-way through the logs and was wondering why the men were looking at me so strangely and saying nothing, when suddenly from behind logs where they had been lying concealed, up jumped a dozen more men with their knives drawn. The others simultaneously drew their knives and all approached me and surrounded me menacingly.

I halted and felt myself go very pale, and was horribly annoyed with myself. I tried to see the tip of my nose to know if I really was as pale as I felt and found it was so. Somebody would have to pay for my shame.

I didn't speak, but was thankful that some premonition of trouble had made me put a little Webley automatic pistol in my pocket that morning; a silly little weapon at the best, firing nickel bullets which would hardly stop a determined man. Now its trigger spring was broken and it was unloaded!

I wasn't altogether sorry, as I was so angry at being so pale—yes, I was really alarmed as well—that I might have fired at these fellows and been sorry afterwards.

One truck driver, a villainous fellow with a scarred face and bandy legs, seemed to be the ringleader. He confronted me with his knife and said they had come to demand their pay immediately, and if I didn't give it to them . . . He concluded with an expressive flourish of his knife.

I didn't know what to say or do.

I wasn't certain, if I tried to speak, whether my voice would betray my fear. I had my hand in my pocket holding the little pistol which wouldn't work.

Suddenly, without any conscious thought, I found myself jabbing the muzzle of that pistol very hard into Bandy-legs' face, just under his left eye, and forcing him backwards as I yelled swear words at him—in English!

Whether he and his mates thought the pistol was loaded, or whether the sound of angry English words scared them, I shall never know, but they all backed away from me. Bandy-legs stumbled over a log as I forced him before me. Then I turned to face them and cover them with the useless pistol as I stepped backwards the ten yards or so to the door of my house.

The men looked bewildered and gave me time to leap into

the office, where I quickly grabbed one of the loaded police Winchesters which I keep there.

Then I felt secure and happy again.

I flicked the lever as I stepped out on to the veranda and knew that eight men would go down before they got me.

But they weren't prepared to risk it.

They glowered at me for a few minutes after I had commanded them to say their say, then they slunk away one by one and left me feeling very perplexed. Bandy-legs had disappeared entirely or I might have had a shot at him.

I think he had hidden himself behind the logs when he saw me go into the house.

I couldn't think what I should do.

It was too risky—with all the men in an angry mood about their wages—to attempt to arrest any of them. I was too much alone amongst strangers to be as brave and commanding as I wanted to be.

As it was Sunday morning, my old foreman, Julio Lopez, was away at his house in Agua Verde. The big foreman of trucks, Manuel Palavecino, was nowhere in sight. The blacksmith and the mechanic, the only other entirely reliable men, were busy in the saw-mills and hadn't apparently seen what had happened. Through the whole brief, but very alarming, event the saws had rung out their musical note just as if my precious life wasn't in great danger.

I realized that I must show some sort of bold face or be presently overwhelmed.

Carrying the Winchester as casually as my anxiety permitted, I walked down to the store, where my assailants had gone. They were not in their usual place in front of the store, but I heard a great deal of excited talking going on behind it. I walked round and there found my fat friend, Juan Largo, in the act of handing out mugs of gin to the crowd of men who stood round him. As soon as they saw me they were all suddenly silent and looked very guilty.

Long John was the exception. He at once handed his bottle of gin to a man beside him and stepped towards me.

"Ah, Don Juan," he gushed. "I am horrified to hear of what has just occurred. These boys have been very foolish,

but they didn't mean any harm, I assure you. They were only having a game with you, Don Juan. You've taught them a good lesson and I've just been telling them what a good master you are to them and saying they must at once apologize. Haven't I, boys?"

There wasn't the least doubt in my mind that the fat brute was not only lying, but that he was the instigator of the whole affair. But there was nothing I could do. We owe him a lot of money, with little chance of paying him apparently. If his troop of bullock trucks goes we shall be quite unable to fulfil urgent contracts. I imagine that he wants me out of the way so that he can get some friend of his here, in my place, who will help him in his dishonest practices, instead of thwarting him as I have done.

There was nothing for it, I saw, but to meet guile with guile.

I glanced around the guilty faces of the men who watched me and realized that they were not really criminals. They don't put much value on life perhaps, but they are not murderers. They had perhaps only been trying to frighten me, egged on by Juan Largo, to whom they all owe money, I expect.

I smiled as I looked at them and balanced the Winchester in my hands.

"Yes, I know what you feel like," I said, "and I can understand your annoyance at not getting your wages. I have already told you that if the money doesn't come by next week I shall sell enough timber locally to pay you all. Do you believe me, or don't you?"

I snapped out the question angrily, as I felt that bluff was essential. Most of them replied "yes," but apparently without conviction.

"Very well, then. Let there be no more nonsense such as happened just now"—Lord only knows I didn't believe it was nonsense, but it was as well to treat it as nothing very serious—"next time any of you play those tricks someone is going to be badly hurt, and it won't be me."

I looked significantly at Long John as I said this and saw him blink as if he knew what I meant. The men grinned as they also looked at him, and I believe they realized from my implied threat that I understood the origin of the trouble. I continued :

"As far as you are concerned the matter is ended" (I could only pray that it was), "but I intend to punish Arroyo (Bandy-legs). Where is he?"

"He went off directly after, *Patron*."

"Which way?"

"Over the bridge, sir."

"On foot or mounted?"

"On his horse, sir."

"Right. I'll deal with him later. Now, as you can't get any money for drink, you'd better disperse."

I turned to Juan Largo, who, I saw, was trying to conceal something by a movement of his foot amongst the litter of empty boxes which lay behind the store.

I guessed what he had there.

"Now, Largo, pick up those bottles, and bring them with you and follow me."

As I spoke I turned over a packing-case with the muzzle of my rifle and exposed a case of gin bottles; the cheap but potent square-face gin which everyone drinks here.

Long John is much too important a person, by local estimation, ever to think of carrying anything himself. He turned to one of the men and told him to pick up the case of gin.

"No," I snapped, banging the case noisily with my rifle, "I told you to bring it, didn't I?"

His fat face went a little green for a moment and he looked at me with a queer expression.

"But, Don Juan——"

"But nothing," I snapped, making my voice as savage as I could. "Pick it up."

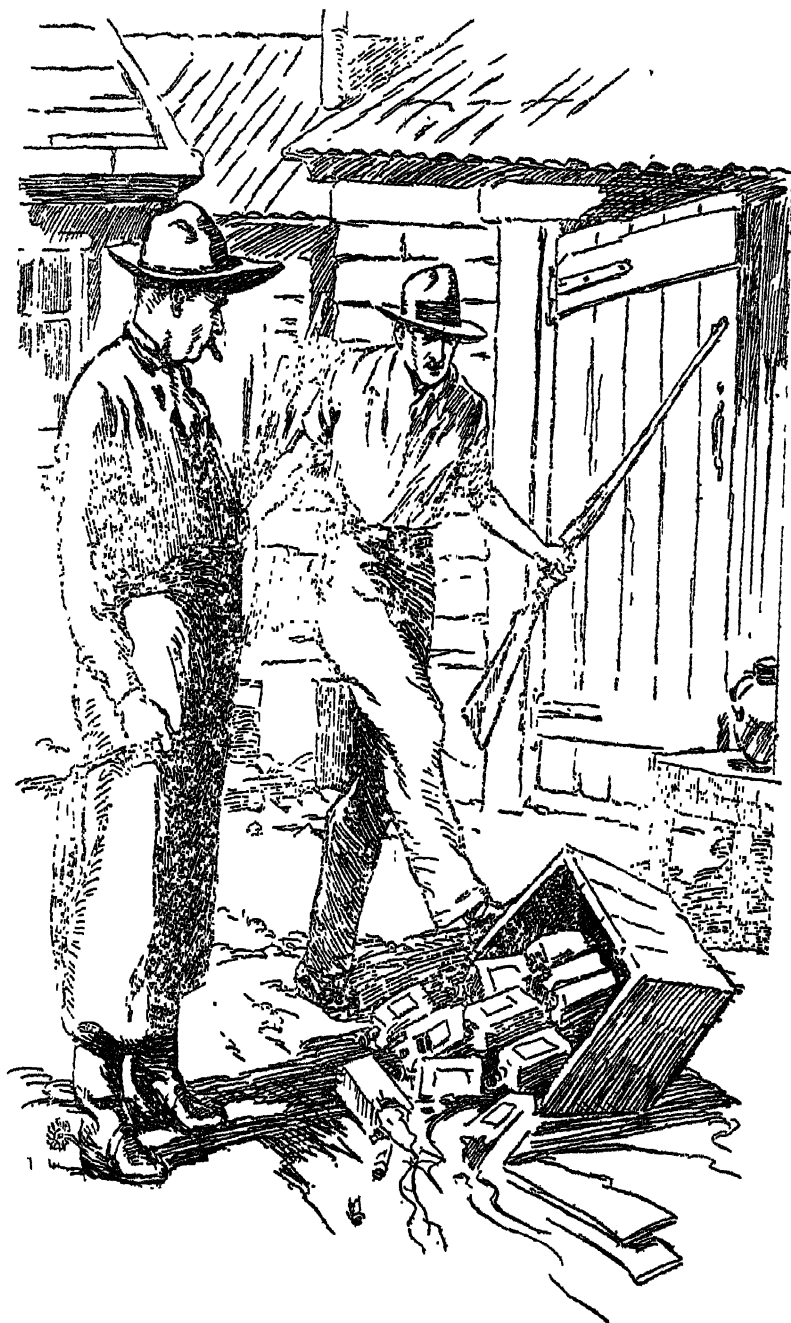
"Now, Señor Don Juan, please," he pleaded, just as I expected and hoped.

"Very well, if you won't do as I say——"

And with that I kicked over the case and, as the bottles fell out, swung round my rifle and smashed them all with the butt.

"That will save you all trouble, won't it?" and I smiled broadly at the astonished faces which gaped at my wicked waste of "good liquor."

I was still hesitating about the right note and moment on which to withdraw with greatest effect, when from round the



KICKED OVER THE CASE

store appeared Palavecino with two of the cattlemen who are his particular friends.

They were all tall fellows, with the quiet, steady eyes of the best type of these forest workers. I realized at once that they were all on my side, for their glance seemed to compel all the other men to turn and slink away.

"Are you all right, *Patron*?" asked Palavecino with a smile as he looked at the broken gin bottles. "We've just heard that there has been some trouble."

"All over now," I replied, "except that Arroyo, who seems to have been the ringleader—no, the spokesman" (here I glanced at Long John again), "has disappeared. I intend to punish him. Ride after him and bring him back. He rode away across the bridge. A day or two in the stocks will do him good."

I walked away as I spoke, but with a feeling that Long John might very likely have a shot at my back with the huge revolver he always wears. For all my bluff in treating the matter lightly, I knew he was furiously angry. I was glad to turn the corner of the store and be out of his sight.

Palavecino and his friends soon proved to me that they thought the incident anything but trifling.

"Juan Largo is your very dangerous enemy, *Patron*," they assured me, "you'll have to be very careful."

Palavecino surprised me by saying that all the cattlemen and a lot of the truck drivers were on my side and would gladly help me.

"Let me bring some of them to sleep here in your outhouses to-night, *Patron*. You ought not to leave yourself unguarded."

I felt quite alarmed at this, but I refused to let myself be protected. It would be admitting fear; which is far worse than being frightened, I think. Moreover, it encourages one's enemies.

"No. Leave it to me to settle. I know how to get round these men, who are only doing what Largo tells them. I'll soon make it clear that it won't pay them to be against me any longer. You go and bring back Arroyo for me. I'll make an example of him."

"Aye, Señor. We'll bring him back all right, as an example,"

replied Palavecino, with a wink at his companions which made them smile.

Presently they galloped away along the road towards the bridge, leaving me with the happy realization that I had better friends around me than I had thought.

The rest of the day and the night passed off quietly. In the morning the men went to work as usual, but with a rather sulky mein, for which I could not blame them. I felt sulky myself, to think that we were all working hard to make the estate profitable, and succeeding, yet the money for wages was not forthcoming.

At about nine o'clock Juan Largo's portly figure, mounted on his swagger-looking mule, and followed by two of his men appeared as usual along the road from the bridge. He comes here nearly every day to attend to his affairs; to kill a bullock for the men's meat supply, and so forth. I noticed that he was hurrying and that, instead of going straight for the store, beside which is his butcher's shop, he made for my office where I was working. I was rather apprehensive lest he had some new method of attack prepared.

Outside the office he quickly swung his great fat body out of the saddle in the light and easy way which always astonishes me, handed his mule to one of his men and, with his spurs jangling, stalked quickly into the office. I at once noticed that he was excited and nervous. He stuttered slightly, and had difficulty in getting out what he had to say, and with his whip pointed in the direction of the bridge. When at last he explained, I was as excited and nervous as he was, and still more dumb.

I went out to the veranda and shouted for my horse, which is always ready saddled in the corral.

Together we galloped to the bridge and there, obviously having been dragged by a *lazo*, right in the middle of the bridge, was the body of Arroyo with a dozen or more horrible knife gashes in his head. Vultures had already added to the horror of the sight.

Long John demanded that I, as *Comisario* of Police, should investigate the matter forthwith, arrest everyone likely to be guilty, telegraph to the chief of police of the province, and so on.

Well, it may seem strange to you, who live in a civilized land, but I am responsible to no one for the way I maintain law and order here, as long as I do maintain it. A killing is a very ordinary occurrence into which no one need enquire very far, if the local *Comisario* decides otherwise.

I said nothing to Long John, but remounted my horse and rode back to the mill. There I collected four of the men who had participated in the threatening demonstration of the previous morning, led them back to the bridge, and made them carry the body back to the mill and lay it under a shed where everyone could see it.

Arroyo had no relatives, and apparently no friends here, to mourn him or claim the right of burying him.

I let the body lie there until the lumber trucks came down from the forest in the evening, so that I might watch Palavecino as he was told the news. His complete unconcern and his slow smile told me all I wanted to know.

At dusk we buried the body. There is no ceremony about such matters here; no priest within a hundred miles. Burial is merely disposal of a corpse in the quickest manner.

Yet there was a peculiar feeling of reverence for, or fear of, something or someone as the men who stood about the grave saw the earth shovelled in again.

I was conscious of many eyes watching me with an expression which made me think very hard.

Whether I have added to my authority over this strange lot of bandits time alone will prove.

All very perplexing, and I feel very remote and alone. Thank God for Angela, whose sympathy and understanding are wonderful.



JUAN LARGO'S PORTLY FIGURE, MOUNTED ON HIS
SWAGGER-LOOKING MULE

OIL AGAIN. SEATS OF THE MIGHTY

No. 36

Miraflores

I HAVE been visiting the seats of the mighty since I last wrote; marble halls, and all the rest of it.

Don Diego sent along all the money I needed as soon as he got my account of the attack, and the killing of Arroyo. He also sent me a most elaborate, but very useful, revolver, with a mother-of-pearl stock! And a great knife like a cutlass, with a hilt all gilt and fancy stuff, in an ornate, but very well-made, scabbard. Apparently his idea is that I shall make a bold display of my armoury. Helpful, eh?

He informed me that he has floated a company for exploiting the oil on this estate. He is sending up a Yankee expert prospector very soon, and a whole train-load of machinery for well-boring!

He enclosed a sheaf of strange things, which are called "blue-prints" I believe, and are plans of the boring plant, in white lines on stiff blue paper. They convey next to nothing to me, except one which shows a thing just like a steam roller, or one of those engines which I have seen dragging travelling fairs about the roads at home.

Don Diego says that he can't possibly come to help with the erection of the plant and that, as soon as the prospector has told me the best place to erect it—when it arrives—I must carry on as best I can.

How the devil I am to get that steam roller and all the other obviously gigantic machinery along the appallingly rough road from the station here, and then up the jungle paths into the hills, just beats me. Almost impossible, I fear.

The first step was to obtain permission from the Provincial Government for "mineral rights" on the estate. There is some drastic law about such matters apparently. There would be, of course, where big money is concerned, though we can kill each other with impunity.

No one person can get a permit to dig for minerals (oil is a mineral) over more than a very restricted area of country.

As Don Diego must have the rights over the whole of his estate, which is the size of an English county, permission must be applied for by a hundred separate people, who will then transfer their rights to Don Diego, if permitted by the Minister for the Interior of the province.

I had to get a hundred of the men here to put their marks on documents which Don Diego's lawyer sent me, have them witnessed—with more marks (these fellows all have their own hieroglyphic sign, usually the same as their private brand for their horses)—then more documents asking to transfer their rights to Don Diego, with more witnesses and more marks.

My next job was to go to Salta, the capital of the province, where, armed with all my documents and many maps, I was to interview the Minister and obtain his sanction to what, I gather, is anything but an orthodox transaction.

Don Diego warned me that I might encounter difficulty, but that it could be overcome by a "little gift." He sent me one thousand pesos—roughly eighty pounds—which I was to present to the Minister.

Last week I duly went to Salta, more than delighted to be in a town again, and, in my best suit, called at the palatial government offices.

Don Diego had arranged an appointment for me, so that I wasn't made to wait for hours, as most people are who try to see high officials here.

I was escorted along splendid corridors—where my dried-up shoes squeaked abominably—until I arrived before a vast pair of mahogany doors, on which my escort knocked several times, very discreetly, before a voice ordered us to enter.

Having flung open the doors and announced my name loudly, my escort left me to my fate.

I found myself in a vast hall, all marble, mahogany and majolica, with a desk away at the far end of it, about a hundred yards off it seemed, behind which sat a lonely gent, who was deep in meditation and did not even look at me as I stood hesitating.

Agnes seemed to pass before I decided to traverse the wide

open space of marble floor. My shoes screamed. My mouth went dry. My arms moved in every sort of unnatural contortion. I felt certain, as the Minister dreamily lifted his eyes at last, that I had forgotten to fasten my trouser buttons.

Sweating copiously, I managed to reach the desk on which I deposited my great sheaf of documents. I found that I had entirely forgotten every word of Spanish and just stood there, blinking, before the trance-like gaze of the Minister, who said no word.

At long last, just as I was hopelessly about to explain my mission in English, His Excellency let go a prodigious sigh, while he swept a fat white hand across his eyes as though to wipe away all the cares of his great office. Then he looked at me as if just aware of my presence, stood up, and said "How-dodo," in Spanish of course, and invited me to be seated.

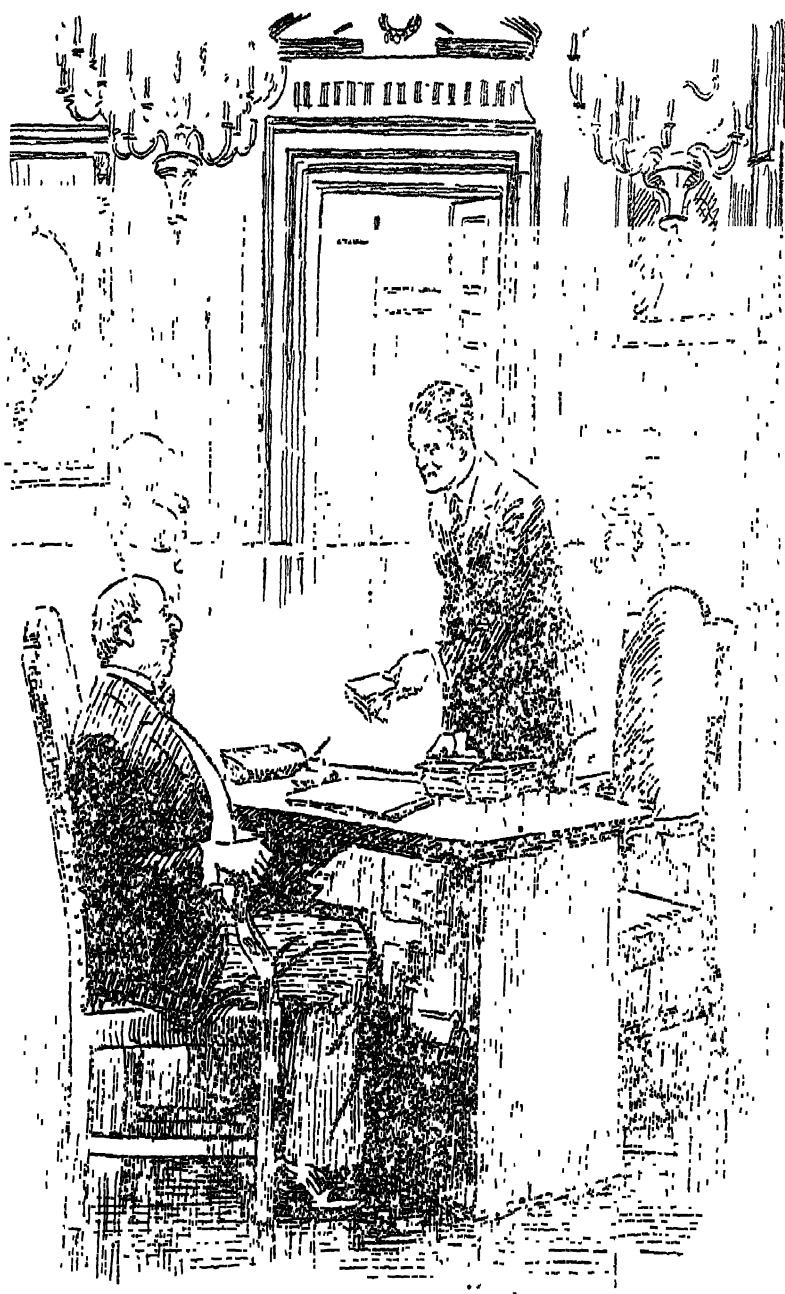
I obeyed promptly and hurriedly blurted out the object of my mission, then took the ten hundred-dollar notes from my wallet and, with a bright smile, said, "This will no doubt assist Your Excellency to expedite the matter."

For a moment his eyes flashed between the nice new bank notes, which I had expressly brought, and my own grinning face. Then he rose again from his chair with a look of utmost indignation on his swarthy face.

"Señor Englishman," he proclaimed loudly, meanwhile pressing a bell on his desk, which immediately brought a black-coated secretary person through a nearby door, "you are a guest in my great country and a stranger from a far land, therefore you are no doubt ignorant of the strict code of honour which we, in this great republic, are proud to obey. I will, therefore, excuse you for the abominable insult which your youth and ignorance has no doubt caused you to offer me. Señor, I wish you good day."

With that he gave a contemptuous push to the papers I had placed on his desk, signalled to the secretary fellow to show me the door, then disappeared through another door.

Ye Gods, I felt abashed. Never could I have imagined that I, who have always been rather proud of my honourable dealings hitherto, should have lived to be so reproved for a miserable attempt at a dirty bit of corrupt bribery.



"THIS WILL NO DOUBT ASSIST YOUR EXCELLENCY"

My first impulse was to shout out that the idea was not mine; that I did but obey the instructions of my employer, himself a countryman of the Minister; but that seemed to be cowardly. "Sneak," I heard almost forgotten schoolboy voices say.

Nothing for it but to gather up my papers and depart as promptly as possible. The thought that my clumsy efforts had ruined the prospects of a fortune from the oil well did nothing to relieve my misery.

Mr. Secretary held the door open as my shoes wailed and whined their disapproval of their wearer. I fancied I detected a malignant leer in the fellow's eyes as I nodded in farewell. I wondered why he had been summoned to witness my degradation.

Outside the room I was soon lost in a maze of great marble-lined and floored corridors, where a few ornamental soldiers stood or lounged and showed no sort of inclination to guide me to the exit.

I was about to enquire my way, when a door opened and another black-coated fellow came out and accosted me. He obviously knew all about me, for he at once began an explanation that the Minister was willing to reconsider his perhaps too severe dismissal, that my ignorance should be permitted to account for my misdemeanour, and if I would return forthwith the Minister would sign the necessary permits. You can imagine my delight. I was prepared to make the most sincere and abject apology.

"Lead on, McDuff," I said, or words to that effect.

But no! There was definite hesitation.

"If the Señor will kindly hand me the money which has caused so much pain to the Minister, then there will be no danger of a recurrence of such a tragedy."

We looked at each other intently for a few moments. Then I handed over the cash and was led back to the Minister, who signed my papers hurriedly with scarcely a glance at them, bowed and again dismissed me.

I shall never know what happened to those nice new bank-notes, but I learned a useful lesson in diplomacy.

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Having deposited the precious documents in the room of the hotel where I was staying, I went to buy some presents for Angela and finished up with an entire trousseau, which has given her the greatest joy of her life.

Then I explored the town, which is very like Tucuman on a smaller scale, having apparently begun with a bandstand, then a handsome plaza round it, then a hotel or two, and several gay restaurants and magnificent government buildings, all facing the *plaza*.

Behind this bold front are ancient unpaved roads with substantial iron-grilled residences, which quickly give way to a huddle of little shacks in all directions, which tropical growths try every day to swallow up.

In the hotel I met another Englishman from some far-away estate, who was spending a few days' holiday in the town. We made merry together, and I found delight in talking my own language again. We dined in a restaurant, and fell in with representatives of all Europe, and presently played poker until daybreak in the restaurant, with sleepy waiters, who never complained, to attend to our wants.

We two Englishmen, a German merchant, a Yankee prospector, a Danish engineer, a Dutch fellow of unknown profession, and a French explorer made up the party. All we had in common was a working knowledge of Spanish and poker, but we made a gay night of it, and I managed to win a useful bit of money.

Altogether a quite successful trip.

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This place seemed very wild and rather sordid when I returned, but the welcome I had from Angela and my dogs made up for everything.

Did I tell you that Don, the St. Bernard, and Chila, the fox terrier, are now my faithful friends? The latter has a litter of puppies which look almost pure-bred. Where she found a father for them I can't imagine. Her efforts to oblige the great St. Bernard were really pathetic, but quite in vain. She even stood on a log in the hope of equalizing stature. Too sad!

JAGUAR. COARSE FISH. A JUNGLE BELL

No. 37

Miraflores

I HAVE made a most interesting discovery.

Every Sunday afternoon, lately, I have been fishing, and I either get not the slightest sign of a rise or else the *dorado* are so hungry that they take my bait immediately it touches the water. Now that the big pool is cleared of tree trunks I don't lose any.

The spot where I fish is in a rapid where the river emerges from a narrow and very deep channel between rocks. It is the only place I have found where the *dorado* will take the bait, and the only bait they will take is the live minnow. I have tried a dozen kinds of fly and artificial baits, in still and broken water, but haven't had a single rise. Neither will they take the live minnow in still water. I have also tried other rapids up and down the river, but without result.

That one spot seems to be their feeding place. And a wonderful spot it is for other reasons.

On the side of the river that I fish from there are heaps of great rounded boulders like granite. Between two huge ones, the size of elephants, runs the river very swiftly. It is low now as we have had no rain for months. When it is in flood all the rocks must be submerged.

On the far side of the river, just below this rapid, is a back-water with a little sandy beach. Beyond it is a small patch of thick jungle and then a very steep jungle-covered cliff in a semi-circular shape. This cliff has its two ends right on the river and is quite unclimbable.

The current just there is too strong for anyone to swim against, so that the beach and the little flat bit of jungle have probably never been trodden by man.

Last Sunday I was lying on the rock beside the rapid, just being lazy. The men who accompanied me had taken the rods and wandered away up-stream to see if they could find a new and likely rapid, so that I was quite alone.

There was a little breeze. The mosquitoes and sand flies, which are the curse of this place, were not very troublesome.



AS IF A TANGLE OF LEAVES AND BRANCHES HAD
SUDDENLY TURNED THEMSELVES INTO A JAGUAR

I was soothed by the cool, swift rush of water between the rocks on which I lay. Lord only knows what I was thinking about. Suddenly I was aware that for quite a while, yet unconsciously, because of its extraordinary protective colouring, I had been gazing at a very savage animal.

It just seemed to grow out of the jungle on the opposite shore, not thirty yards from where I lay. It didn't come there as I watched. It just was there; as if a tangle of leaves and branches had suddenly turned themselves into a jaguar.

Possibly some movement I had made had caused the creature to move also, so that its shape became suddenly visible to my unaccustomed eyes. However, there it was, with flaming eyes staring in my direction and the tip of its tail quivering just enough to be distinguishable against the background of leaves. You can guess how still I lay then. The wind was up-river and the jaguar a little below me, therefore it couldn't get my scent.

After what seemed ages the great, lithe creature ceased to stare in my direction. Its tail swished more vigorously once or twice, then, with a silent, sliding sort of movement, quite effortless and as if it was being blown along, it crossed the few feet of sandy beach to the edge of the water.

It stood there awhile with its head lowered, and its eyes staring suspiciously in my direction, before it at last decided that its thirst must be quenched.

It was so thrilling to watch, so unexpected, since I had no idea that any such dangerous animal could be so close to the village, that I endured agonies of discomfort from lying so still on the rock rather than disturb it.

Naturally I felt the age-old instinct of slaughter. I wished I had a rifle with me, but quickly realized that it would be impossible to cross the river at any place where one could land within the semi-circle of cliff. The current is so swift just there that the strongest swimmer would be swept down beyond the cliff to where the river widens into a deep, still pool.

I had turned my eyes down-stream for an instant to study the possibilities and when they returned once more to the little beach the jaguar had gone, disappeared as silently and mysteriously as if it had been a ghost.

I imagine I must have moved my head as I looked away and thereby alarmed the creature.

I waited for about a quarter of an hour, hoping it would return, and had just decided to go home when out of the little patch of jungle appeared two forest deer. On dainty feet they stepped lightly across the little beach, evidently far less suspicious than the jaguar, and drank.

I wondered what other shy jungle creatures I might see presently in this little sanctuary, which is evidently a favourite drinking-place in the dry season, when the streams in the hills are almost all dried up.

Often when riding through the forest the men have pointed to what they said was the spoor of jaguar or puma or tapir, but, except for wild pig and the little deer, I have never seen a sign of any wild animals, therefore I have been inclined to doubt the signs to which the men have pointed. Now I know that they have been right and that jaguar really do exist quite close by.

The deer drank for a moment quite unconcernedly, even wading into the backwater a little way, with their little tails flickering as if with pleasure. Then they suddenly leapt away into the bush as if desperately alarmed. I knew that I had made no movement, so was not entirely surprised when the jaguar—or possibly another one—reappeared out of the bushes and approached the water.

It drank thirstily, then, with a sudden twist of its body and a lash of tail, it turned and leapt into the jungle. Whether after the deer or because some greater animal was heard approaching, I can't say.

I don't know of any denizen of these forests likely to alarm a jaguar. The tapir is larger, but is a harmless beast, I should say, but after my surprise at seeing these animals so close to me, I should not have been altogether astonished if a mammoth or even a dinosaur had suddenly appeared.

My patient watch was presently disturbed by the return of the men to whom I excitedly told of my experience.

They took no interest at all, merely saying that such scenes are very common! They apparently thought my excitement childish. On our way home, they told me that jaguar are

dangerous brutes and will lie on the branch of a tree ready to drop on to cattle that pass underneath. They have been known to drop on to a man and horse, so I shall ride with greater caution in future.

Puma, apparently, are not savage towards men. These fellows even tried to make me believe that pumas like human beings and when encountered show a desire to play like cats. I'm not going to believe that story, anyhow.

I am hoping to see a puma on my little beach next Sunday perhaps, and I fear that I shall neglect the fishing, as this big game watching is far more thrilling, and one can't do both at that spot.

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I have been out, one or two nights, fishing by lamplight for the tame *bagre*, solely for cooking purposes and change of diet. It is quite good eating, almost boneless. Cut in steaks and fried, it tastes like cod. But they are the dullest fish imaginable to catch: a bamboo pole, a length of coarse line, a big hook—made by Caturelli, the blacksmith—with a lump of smelly meat as bait. A hurricane lamp close to the water evidently attracts them to the edge of any still pool. They gently swallow the bait—often one feels nothing—and then lie quite quiet and do nothing about it: no sign of any struggle or even resentment.

When they are hooked one just yanks them out of the water. Even then they don't struggle, but just lie gasping and opening and shutting their great ugly mouths and looking foolish. They are hideous, mud-coloured creatures, with long, pendulous feelers on their lower jaws. They weigh from five to ten pounds.

I find it very soothing after a long, tiring day riding through the forest, measuring and marking logs and all the hundred and one other jobs which I have to attend to, to spend a couple of hours on the river bank in the dark with fireflies fluttering about so silently. The air is cooler, I fancy, and the murmuring of the river very peaceful. The rains are due and the heat becoming horrible, the forest getting very parched everywhere and pasture for the cattle very scarce. All rather worrying.

By the side of the river I can forget it all for a while. I let my thoughts float away on the stream to where it joins other

rivers and then on to the great River Plate, and eventually out to the great blue ocean, where wholesome gales blow and ships sail away to the green glories of old England.

I'm not home-sick, but the river is a definite connecting link, isn't it?

One night I was listening to the musical trill of the millions of insects whose voices fill the air here all night long, when suddenly, just across the river, a bell rang. Not the jangling bell which is hung on the neck of the oldest animal of a herd of cattle very often, but a marvellously clear and beautiful little bell, like someone hitting a good wineglass with a small silver spoon perhaps.

It rang a dozen times, then a pause, and a few more rings. Then a long pause before another little peal. There was a fairy-like sweetness to the sound which is indescribable, loud enough to carry a hundred yards or more, yet more beautiful and gentle than any bell any human being could make.

It went on for ten minutes or so and thrilled me. I felt as if someone were trying to signal to me. All rather ghostly in the still, dark night.

I have asked many men here about it. They all know of it and say they think the sound is made by a frog, but no one knows for certain.

I long to hear it again.

Another interesting bit of natural history was when a man brought me a big leaf from the forest. Stuck to its under side were six chrysalises—or is it chrysalids?—of the most brilliant polished silver, about an inch long. I put the leaf in a box, hoping that the things would hatch out. The next day they were tarnished to a dull brown and eventually they shrivelled up to almost nothing.

The Yankee oil prospector chap arrives to-morrow, so I shall be busy. It will be grand to talk English again.

OIL AGAIN, AND WHISKY

No. 38

Miraflores

MY God! What a prospector! If oil exists in the bottom of whisky bottles that Yankee must be one of the best prospectors in the world.

I met him at the station. He began by being distressed that there was no proper pub there. We went at once to the general store, where he drank half a bottle before I could persuade him to mount his horse. He also bought a case of a dozen bottles to take with us. As he proposed staying less than a week, I thought the quantity excessive, rather.

He seemed to be very unaccustomed to being in the saddle and explained that he had not long been in this country.

As we rode along I noticed that he paid no attention to the surroundings, geological or otherwise. His conversation was only about what a God-forsaken jungle it was and about the absence of pubs.

Arrived at my house, he at once tackled the whisky, with never a glance at the work which was going on about us. There were still two or three hours of daylight available, so I suggested a stroll along the river to study the geology of the cliffs and so on.

Not he. He took off his boots and collar and settled down for a good soak.

I went about my work and left him to it. I returned after dark and found him trying to persuade Angela to drink with him. She was laying the table for dinner and was obviously annoyed. The fellow wasn't drunk, I doubt if he could get really drunk, but was just stupidly persistent.

After dinner, I managed to persuade him to look at the blue-prints of the oil-boring machinery which is due to arrive—ten railway trucks of it—at any moment now. I have the bills of lading.

He did show a slight interest and explained one or two



MY GOD ! WHAT A PROSPECTOR !

problems to me, but soon tired of the subject and returned to his chair and his bottle.

I endured his maudlin conversation for an hour, then asked him what time he would like to start out on his survey in the morning. I proposed to begin by showing him the spot where the shale rock had ignited.

"Why, daybreak, I guess," he replied. "Always start work before daybreak where I come from, but I guess you English men are lazy, so I won't hurry you."

"Right oh. I'll call you at five o'clock and we'll have a cup of coffee before leaving."

"What's that? You'll call me? Why, buddy, I'll be up and about long before you, I guess. Early birds cash worms, eh? Tha's why we Murricans cash all a worms, 'cos we start early, while t'other fellow's in bed."

By the look of him just then I felt that worms, or pink snakes, would be about all he ever would cash, or catch, in this world.

However, at five o'clock I tried to rouse him. Beside his bed, on a chair, was another empty whisky bottle and a glass. His candle had burnt right away. He had slept fully clothed, except for his coat and boots. With his mouth wide open and his greying hair in untidy wisps over his forehead, he lay on his back, snoring loudly.

I shouted at him, shook him, shook his bed, and did everything to try to wake him, but without effect.

Not until nine o'clock did he eventually appear on the veranda, with a glass of whisky in his hand, and obviously worms in his head.

About eleven I managed to get him mounted, with a bottle of whisky in his saddle-bag, and we rode off.

The shale cliff apparently struck him as an excellent spot in which to rest and refresh himself, but nothing more. I put lumps of the grey stone under his nose, but he thrust them aside with a contemptuous gesture.

"S'no good, buddy. 'S'not oil. 'S'no good at all. Not oil country, I guess. Have a drink."

So it went on. I took him to several other spots where there were outcrops of rock of different kinds, but he took no sort of interest in them, so far as I could see.

Eventually I gave it up as hopeless and said we might as well go home. I said that we seemed to be wasting time.

"Aye, you've said it, I guess," he replied with a grin. "And money, too."

For all his drunkenness I felt that there was a gleam of intelligence in his voice. I wondered whether he might have the queer sort of second sight which some drunkards possess, and knew, by the general formation of the country, that oil was very unlikely to be found there.

But he was not the man to discuss anything seriously. Perhaps in a day or two he would sober up and make a proper survey. If he didn't, I couldn't think how he could possibly make the report on oil prospects which the new company had sent him to do.

I despatched the two men who had come with us on some errand or other, and the Yankee and I headed for home.

Our way led us through the site of an ancient Jesuit village. (Legend says that the Jesuits who lived there a couple of centuries ago had fled from persecution in Buenos Aires or somewhere.) Now there is nothing to be seen there except a gigantic oven of mud bricks baked very hard. There is a bit of an open space there for some reason, a patch of dry earth on which nothing will grow, and on which I now spotted a big iguana, about a yard long or more, lying asleep.

Iguana tail is mighty good to eat, so, having no gun with us, I decided to have a shot at this fellow with my revolver. I dismounted and gave my reins to the Yankee to hold while I crept cautiously forward. I had about twenty yards to go, and went very slowly so as not to make a sound. At last I got to within certain hitting distance, aimed, and fired.

The iguana did a back somersault and lay belly up. But I felt horror instead of pleasure, for as soon as I had fired I heard a neigh and a snort from the horses, then the sound of galloping hooves.

I looked round, to find that Yankee had also dismounted, leaving the horses to nibble undergrowth, and had followed me.

Now they had gone and I knew they wouldn't stop until they reached home, about eight miles away, and sunset due in less than an hour.

The things I said to that Yankee were bad enough, but the things he said to the world in general, when he realized that the remains of his bottle of whisky had gone with the horses, and that he had an eight-mile walk through rough forest path before he would get another drink, were blasphemous enough to start an earthquake.

Despite my anger, I had to laugh at the man's distress. He waved his arms as he cursed God, and oil, and horses, and forests, and, more than all, the mosquitoes, which had been feasting on him all day, as they always will on any newcomer.

I imagined that millions of them must have got very drunk if they had taken one suck at his blood.

I realized that as soon as our horses arrived at the mill someone would set out to find us, but, as I had not told the men who had been with us that I intended returning by way of the Jesuit camp, they would look for us on quite another path.

Nothing for it but to walk.

If you have ever tried to walk through a tropical forest at night, in riding boots, with a blasphemous, flabby, whisky-soaked Yankee for a companion, then you will know what I endured. It was after midnight before, only a mile from home, Palavecino and two other men, leading our horses, eventually found us.

Imagine what I felt when, in the black darkness, I heard Angela's gentle voice also asking if I was all right. She had insisted on coming to help find me.

The Yankee was so exhausted that we had to lift him into the saddle. He spent the next two days in bed, then sat on the veranda and wrote his report, which he read to me.

In it he declares that the whole estate is rich with immense prospects of oil and that, as far as he can judge, there is no more suitable place in which to sink our first bore-hole than right beside the saw-mill!

He took a long drink as he finished reading, and over his glass made me a prodigious wink.

I'm glad I haven't invested any money in this oil company.

Now the "prospector" has gone. Not only has he taken with him a good deal of my faith in oil company schemes, but quite a lot of my money, for I found that there was one thing he excelled at besides drinking whisky, and that was poker.

For two nights we played every variety of the game that two people can play. The more he drank the cleverer he became, or else he is a professional card-sharper pretending to be an oil prospector.

Pretty much the same thing, anyway, as far as I can see.

PROGRESS, DAMN IT !

No. 39

Miraflores

NO wonder I haven't written for so long. The oil-boring machinery is here and partly erected.

What a game! But it might have been worse. I found that the main part of the gear consisted of the traction engine and another great vehicle with huge road wheels, on which could be piled the parts of the tall derrick, etc., but by no means all of it, so we had to use a lot of bullock carts as well.

The traction engine nearly capsized several times on the rough roads, so that we had to take many men to fill in the worst holes.

However, we got it here eventually, after three days' toil, and are now busy trying to put it all together with the help of the plans.

The whole outfit weighs about fifty tons.

The traction engine has a big fly-wheel connected to the other vehicle by a belt which works a crank, which works a thing called a rocking-bar, like a big see-saw. To one end of this rocking-bar is fastened a wire cable, which goes over a wheel on the top of a slanting derrick—guyed with more steel ropes—and then down to the spot where we are to bore the hole. On the lower end of this cable is to be attached a steel rod or bit, weighing five tons, with a hardened end the shape of a molar tooth.

When the rocking-bar rocks up and down it lifts this five-ton bit and lets it fall again, so that it drives into the earth, through soil or sand or rock or anything.

There are also all sorts of contrivances for attaching to the bit, for driving down thousands of feet of six-inch steel pipe,

and tools for fishing out the bit if the cable should break, and valved pipes for pulling out the crushed soil and stone and water—and, perhaps, oil.

My brain is whirling with the complication of it all, so forgive a short letter.

The rains are overdue, the forest and pasture everywhere all dried up, and the cattle dying like frosted flies.

The heat is ghastly. I loathe the sight of the beastly, cruel sun and shake my fist at its brassy face every morning.

DROUGHT AND FLOOD. CANINE REASONING

No. 40

Miraflores

DROUGHT is all I have to tell you about this time. The rains are many weeks late, a most unusual occurrence in these hills, they tell me. As a rule the seasons are absolutely regular, so that work can be accurately arranged. Why the gods must treat me to this vagary I don't know.

My task has been difficult enough already.

It has rained heavily in the higher ranges, for the river is now a brown flood, three times as wide as it was a fortnight ago, with great trees rolling and twisting in the swirling current, and dead cattle, and once the body of a man, though, fortunately, I didn't see it.

We have had one crashing thunderstorm which really frightened me. It seemed to begin right in this valley and the incessant lightning, flash after flash of it with scarcely an interval for over two hours, and thunder which sounded as though the whole mountain range was made of hollow iron and was tumbling into this valley, was almost unbearable.

But not a drop of rain fell. The air was closer than ever after it and smelt of brimstone, or at least I thought so; as if the doors of hell had opened.

There are many hundred head of cattle in the forest, which normally keep in fine condition by cropping the undergrowth—there is practically no grass. Now everything has withered



TWO FELLOWS SPUR THEIR HORSES INTO THE WATER

and the streams and water-holes are all dried up, and the animals too weak to find their way to the river.

In Agua Verde, where my pasture fields are, I have two hundred acres of lucerne sown. Half of it has been grazed to the very earth and the other half is yet only six inches high. If hungry cattle eat unripe lucerne—called *alfalfa* here—in hot weather, the result is fatal. We cut and dry enough of it just to keep the saddle horses going and that is all we can do, except wait for it to grow. The maize crop was consumed long ago.

The first flood demolished our dam in the river, so that irrigation is impossible. Only the vultures flourish.

God knows what I can do. It is terrible.

Ah! I hear distant thunder. Must go and look at the sky.

.

Next night. Yes, the rain came at midnight last night. I left this letter to go and look at the sky and found not a single star shining. While I stood looking up, and perhaps praying, I heard a queer whispering over the forest, as though a wind was rustling the trees. Then, without further warning, came the rain. Just as if my prayer had been instantly granted. Like putting a penny in a slot machine, I thought irreverently. A few minutes later came a great wind, cool and wet, and smelling like a summer shower at home a million times multiplied.

I tore open my shirt and stood out in the rain and wind until I was drenched and almost cold. It was glorious.

To-day, almost incredibly, there is new growth everywhere, in the forest and on the ground. Leaves that yesterday were brown and dry are now green and fresh and seem almost to be wriggling with pleasure.

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I had to go to the station to-day to collect some money, which comes in a sealed packet to the station-master.

At the place where we have to ford the river, about three miles from the station, I found an alarming sight. I hadn't thought of how different it would be after the heavy rains, though the roar of the river can be heard miles off.

When I came to the bank and looked at the swirling brown

torrent, I felt it was quite impossible to cross. Then, higher up on the other side, I saw two fellows spur their horses into the water and in a flash the current had swept them down and across the flood almost to where I stood by the usual ford.

I asked them how I should get across. They guided me back along the road to where I saw that a new path had been trampled through the bush. We followed it and came out again on the river bank a hundred yards above the ford.

"Do as you saw us do, Señor. Keep your horse swimming hard and you'll land at the ford opposite where you were just now."

They waited to watch me, so that I couldn't very well run away, as I felt I should like to. I had Don and Chila with me, but knew how well they could swim so didn't worry about them.

In we went and, swish, we were across. I was wet to the waist, of course, and my boots full, but that was soon remedied.

On the way back, a few hours later, I found the flood much bigger and travelling at a terrific pace, so that I calculated that unless I went a long way up-stream I should miss the landing-place opposite. It is easy enough to spur a horse down the bank almost anywhere, but quite impossible to make him climb out of a raging torrent on to a steep, overgrown bank.

So I hacked a way through the tangled bush with my knife until I came out a hundred and fifty yards higher up the river. Then in we plunged. I thought my horse would be rolled over, and he would have been if I hadn't slipped out of the saddle and hung on to his mane. Obviously he was quite used to such conditions and made a perfect land-fall.

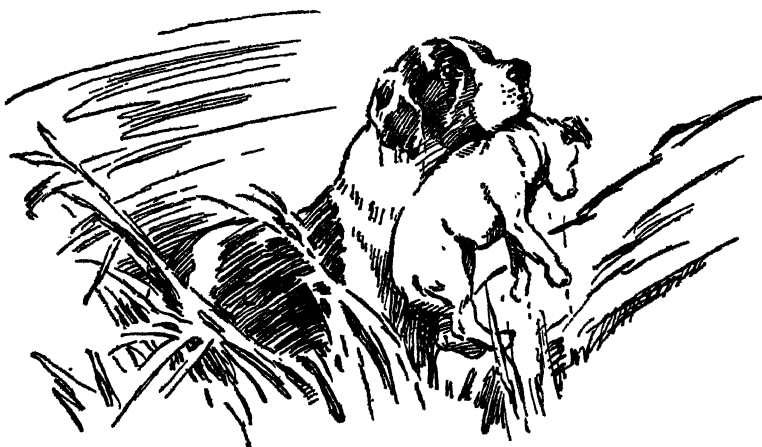
Then I was horrified to see that Chila wasn't with us. Don was shaking his lovely golden coat and I shouted to him that Chila was in the water and being swept down the river.

He looked at me for a second with his great, kind eyes, then at the river, gave a deep-throated bark and—no, he didn't plunge in again—he actually tore away through the bush along the bank down-stream. From where I stood I could see a couple of hundred yards of bank and, presently, far down, I saw him leap from the bank far out into the river. A moment later I saw him scrambling out again, with Chila hanging from his jaws!

They very soon rejoined me, evidently very happy after their adventure.

And there are people who say that dogs cannot reason!

The horses I ride here are hardly worth describing. They are unfriendly little beasts, quite ignorant of any affection from humans and seem to resent any petting. They are generally very lively, perhaps because of the terrific spurs worn by the native horsemen. They are as agile as monkeys in rough country, but have no great endurance. Mules ; grand, sturdy little chaps, are used in all work where great endurance and no speed is required.



DON AND CHILA

Horse-breaking here is most brutal, but most expeditious. No horse is handled until in its third year, then it is roped, hobbled and thrown. While on the ground, a crude saddle is put on with cruelly tight girths—*cinchas* here—a thong of raw-hide is tightly lashed round the lower jaw, with a loop for reins. The horse-breaker—*domador*, we call him—straddles the prostrate animal, the hobbles are undone, someone gives the horse a wallop with a whip and up he struggles with the man on his back. Whoopee ! What a scene follows. Squealing, bucking, rearing, kicking, with the rider yelling enough to terrify an elephant, and pulling with all his strength, first to

one side and then to t'other, on the raw-hide reins so that the horse cannot get his head. How these *domadors* hang on at all is a complete mystery. They are the bravest and toughest fellows I have ever seen, and, queerly enough, usually very docile when out of the saddle, yet, apparently, the cruellest devils with a colt.

After the horse has almost exhausted itself by bucking, and if it has not unseated its rider or fallen over backwards—a rare occurrence—the *domadors* then flogs it mercilessly until it sets off at a gallop, steered by the cruel thong round its bleeding lower jaw. It is galloped until almost at its last gasp and is pulled up trembling, wild-eyed, bleeding and a mass of sweat and foam. It is given a short rest and then more galloping for an hour. The next day it is bitted. In a week “broken.”

BOTTLED BABIES AND BULLOCKS.

A LEPER

No. 41

Miraflores

EVERYTHING is flourishing here now. Don Diego seems to have money for everything I require. I have been on a journey to buy more trained bullocks, for which Caturelli, my dear old blacksmith, and a carpenter are busy building timber trucks. I have got hold of two skilled sawyers, Spaniards, from the emigration office in Buenos Aires. We now have four circular saws and two band saws working on some excellent contracts. And all this prosperity seems to be due to a very foolish mistake that I made.

A few weeks ago I wrote two important letters. One to a very nice firm of timber merchants, Germans, in Buenos Aires to say that weather conditions, etc., had caused delay in fulfilling their orders, but that everything would be all right very soon. The other letter was to Don Diego to say that unless I got more money from him to purchase essentials for the mill and more bullock trucks, and to decrease our debt to Juan

Largo and some of the workmen whose wages are still in arrears, and so on, it would be quite impossible to fulfil the orders I had in hand.

Excellent and very tactful letters they both were. The only fault was that I put them into the wrong envelopes!

I had a furious letter from Don Diego, saying that the German people had been to see him to discuss the whole situation and had made him look a complete fool.

The Germans wrote me a charming letter to say that they were very sorry to have read the letter I sent them in error (it so happens that the head of their firm is also Don Diego—in Spanish—so naturally thought, when he saw a letter which started "Dear Don Diego," that it was for him), and had called on my Don Diego to apologize.

They said they were delighted with the timber I had sent them and wished to help me in any way they could. They have now agreed to a financial arrangement whereby I shall have ample funds to fulfil and greatly increase my contracts with them for the supply of timber.

It just shows that a silly mistake may lead to good fortune sometimes.

I have a suspicion that these nice German people have invested some money in the oil scheme (a separate company as far as finance is concerned). I hope not, for I have no faith in its prospects.

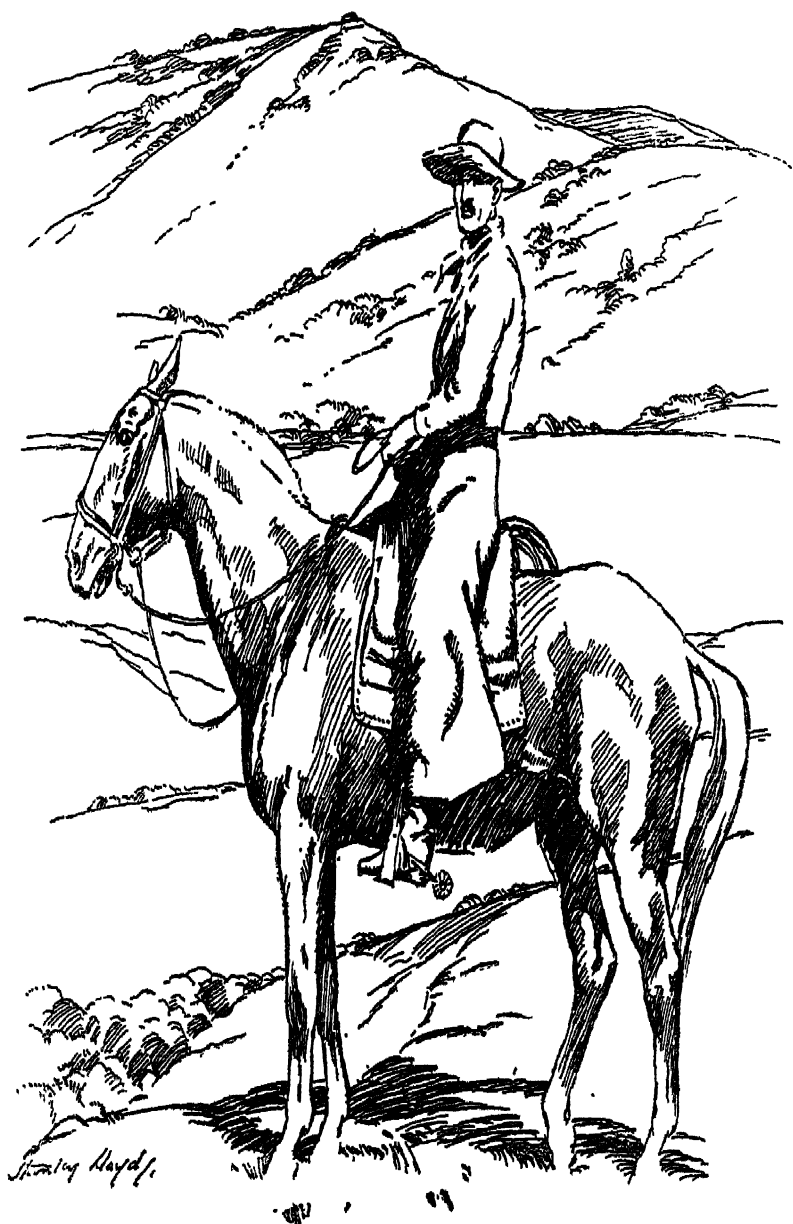
Amongst the new workmen I have engaged is a fellow who is a grand guitar player and has a glorious voice; so now I hear music every night. It makes the whole valley ring and everything seems more human and less primeval and savage. The only trouble is that this fellow is very handsome and I have seen him eyeing Angela with a bit too much interest.

He plays all those wonderful Tango airs that I think I told you about when I was down in the desert. They are most fascinating and haunting and wild. I can't describe them, and shall have to get a guitar and learn to play them some day.

Another fellow has produced a concertina, so that we have the nucleus of an orchestra.

My journey to buy the bullocks was very ghoulish.

I took Palavecino and two cowboys. We rode to the station



VAQUERO—A COWBOY

and then took the train, as the place was sixty or so miles away, through very rough country and thick bush.

When we alighted at our destination it was bright moonlight. We were to stay the night in an inn of sorts and see the cattle in the morning. I had a handbag with me containing pyjamas, and so on, as I intended spending a night or two in another place where I had heard that more bullocks might be bought.

On the station a queer old fellow, with something wrong with his voice, squeaked a plaintive request that he might carry my bag and earn a coin or two. They are proudish people about here and don't often accept charity.

We had a couple of hundred yards to walk through the village to the inn. When we got there the old fellow deposited my bag and held out his hand in the moonlight for his reward.

For a moment I thought he had on a white silk glove, or that his hand was covered with silver paint, for it gleamed, a thin, claw-like, malformed hand, in the most extraordinary way.

I was hesitating to put money into it, as its interest held me.

Then I heard Palavecino shout: "Take care, *Patron!* Leper!"

Phew! I was the lepper! I leapt about ten feet backwards.

It was a long while before I recovered my wits. I had to sacrifice my bag, which I could never touch again. The old leper went off with it, damn him. Of course he knew that that would happen as soon as he saw me get off the train.

Poor devil! I expect he has to find a way to live. Even lepers hang on to life, I suppose.

We bought ten yoke of splendid oxen and got them loaded on a train. On the return journey I got off at a junction called Guemes, where I had to wait two hours for another train, while Palavecino went on with the bullocks.

Guemes is a silly little town, very scattered and very uninteresting, so I spent my time in the station where there is the beginnings of a buffet run by the station-master's wife, an enormously fat Italian woman, to whom I chatted while she supplied me with food and drink. Somehow I asked her if she had any children. With great enthusiasm, she said, "Yes, four," and invited me to go behind the counter to her room, where she would show them to me. Like a fool, I complied. The room was crammed with furniture and useless

ornamentation. She pointed to the mantelshelf proudly and said, "There are my little darlings."

I looked at a cluster of vases, imitation flowers under glass covers, stuffed birds, clocks, etc., and also four sealed jam-jars! which contained things which looked like drowned white rats. Each jar had a label, which I started to read.

Then I was very nearly sick and was out of the room in a flash. After the leper experience it was just too much to have to see the pickled monstrosities which that awful woman obviously cherished with so much affection.

"Can a woman's tender care . . ." I shall feel ill whenever I hear those words in the future.

And to think how I used to gaze at these mountains from the sordid plain and long for their unpolluted heights.

Seems to me that only up amongst the eternal snows, where man cannot live, shall I be really happy.

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We haven't been very successful with oil-boring so far. We got the machinery assembled with less trouble than I had expected, then raised steam in the engine, engaged the belt drive very gently, and all seemed splendid. Then we opened up to full speed, when bang went the eight-foot fly-wheel on the rocking-bar outfit into a dozen pieces, each weighing about a hundredweight. There must have been a flaw in the metal somewhere, for the makers in Buenos Aires made no trouble about sending us a new fly-wheel free of charge. We have been fitting it to-day and shall have another trial run to-morrow.

MORE PROGRESS

No. 42

Miraflores

I AM quite a scientific bloke now, with a sort of laboratory full of glass tubes in which I put samples of all the strata of stuff through which we are boring.

We have only got down about a hundred feet or so yet, as there have been many hitches and none of us know anything

about the gear. We are learning every day, and it is really quite simple until something breaks.

The most interesting part is the washing—panning they call it, I believe—of the crushed soil and rock which we draw out of the bore-hole. That is my job and I am supposed to be able to recognize dozens of different minerals and soils. As yet I hardly know a thing about it. I have a book on the subject which has filled me with hope that I am much more likely, judging by the samples of soil and rock I have already taken, to find gold instead of oil.

It is very thrilling when the men bring me a couple of buckets of mud, to put it through my washing outfit until the clear, sandy sediment remains, and to watch that separate itself into little layers of different minerals. I am always hoping to see the gleam of gold at the lower edge, but no luck so far.

I have had great luck in another way.

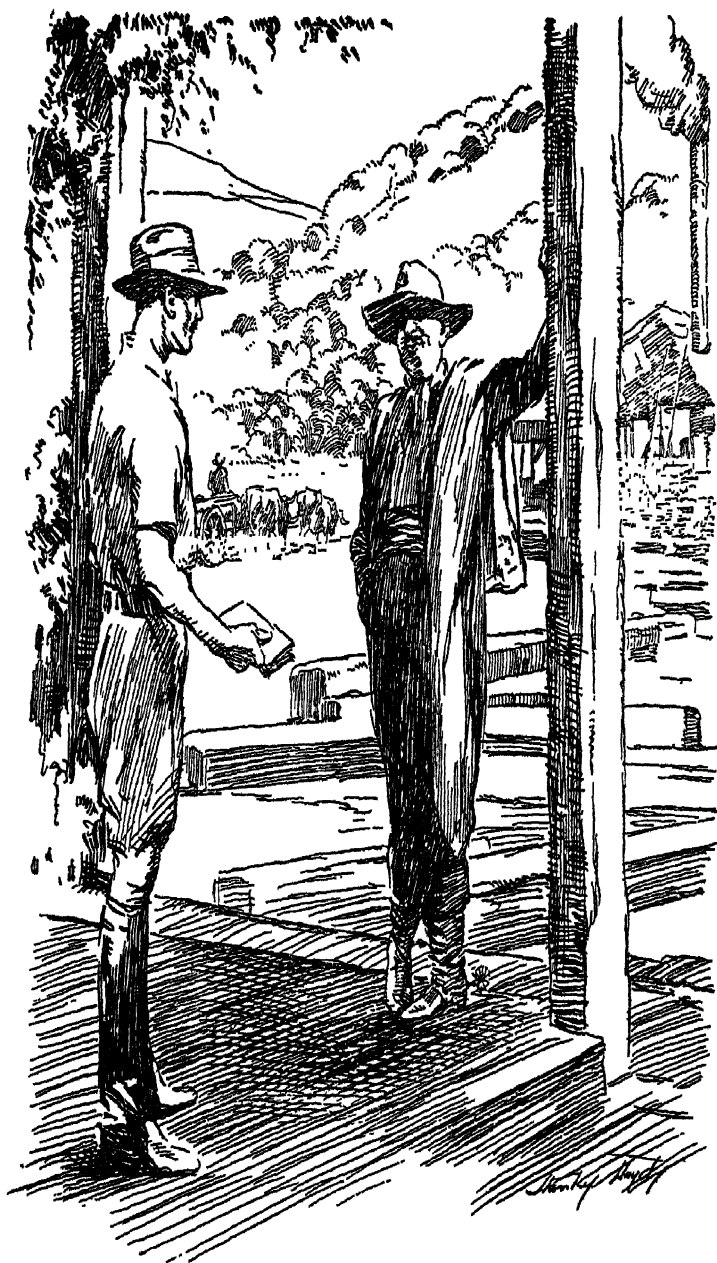
In fact, I suspect that I am getting to be rather cunning through having to deal with so many people whose chief aim is to cheat me if they can.

Don Diego agreed that I should try to buy Juan Largo's troop of bullock wagons, as he has been a perpetual nuisance and endlessly tries to outwit me over the quantities and qualities of the timber he hauls to the mill. He is too clever for me very often, and has done me out of quite a big sum one way and another.

We had tremendous arguments about the cattle which run wild in the forest, and there is no doubt that he has put his brand on a lot of young animals which belong to Don Diego, but it is almost impossible to prove it. There is no place where we can round up all the cattle together, so we have to deal with them in batches when we brand the calves.

The cowboys are a queer lot of fellows who live in little shacks away up in the hills, where their families seem to have lived for generations. About these shacks they have cleared a few acres of land on which they grow maize and marrows, and sometimes a little sugar-cane.

Though almost savages, according to our standards, these cattlemen are not only marvellously skilled at their job of tending cattle in the forest, but are also very conscientious and loyal when they have confidence in their employer. It took



WE DEBATED AND ARGUED

me quite a while to get past their reserve, but now I feel sure of their loyalty.

Unfortunately Juan Largo's men are equally loyal to him, and that has led to considerable bad feeling when there have been disputes about the rightful ownership of unbranded animals.

None of the cowboys considers it wrong, or other than quite legitimate, to lie like anything in the interests of his employer, with the result that I have been very far from knowing how many head of cattle Juan Largo has on the estate, and for which he should pay rent.

As you can imagine, on an estate of some two hundred square miles, almost entirely thick forest and all steep hills and valleys, it is quite impossible to have a complete round-up and count.

These cattle-men can lasso and brand animals in all sorts of hidden spots and by a little skilful herding keep those animals hidden for a year or more. They are absolutely wonderful with their lassos—difficult things to manipulate even on an open plain. To see them galloping hell-for-leather, amongst timber and undergrowth and swinging their lassos with deadly accuracy at a wild steer or young bull, is a joy.

The ponies are as clever as their riders, and never make a mistake. They see at once if there is danger of a lassoed animal running one side of a tree with themselves the other, and twist and turn and jump over fallen logs in the most miraculous way.

The cowboys all wear leather clothing, and, from their saddles, often have great raw-hide shields suspended to protect their legs from the wicked thorns which so many of these jungles produce: thorns often six inches long, like steel skewers, others with hooked ends capable of tearing great holes in unprotected flesh.

Well, when Don Diego said that I could buy Juan Largo's working bullocks and timber trucks, it occurred to me to try a little cunning. I told Largo that I had been instructed to buy all his beef cattle as well, and asked him to name his price.

He was most reluctant to part with them at any price, in fact quite angry, as he realized that it meant losing his business of selling meat to all my workmen and their families.

We debated and argued for a long time, with me letting him think that Don Diego now has so much money to spend that he could afford to buy anything he wanted—the oil-boring

plant was grand evidence in my support, for Largo is quite vague about joint-stock company promoting.

I pretended to be more interested in the beef cattle than in the working bullocks and said that we were prepared to pay a good price for the lot. I had carefully worked out my figures on paper beforehand, knowing that the illiterate brain of Juan Largo would be able to make lightning calculations and beat me if I were not fully prepared.

I suggested the sum of fifty thousand pesos for his herd of beef cattle. In a flash he took my bait—hook, line and sinker—as they say in Cornwall.

“Why, no, Don Juan! That is only seventy-three pesos per head.”

“I think it a very fair offer myself,” I replied. “I don’t know if your figure per head is accurate, but I don’t think we should pay more. What is your idea of a fair price for the lot?”

“At least a hundred pesos per head. That is to say, sixty-eight thousand pesos for the lot.”

I showed no surprise, but used my best poker face as I considered the matter.

“Well, I’ll write to Don Diego and say that you are willing to sell your six hundred and eighty head of beef cattle at a hundred pesos per head.”

Then he saw the trap into which I had led him—to change the fishing metaphor—for he declared only a month ago that he only had five hundred and twenty head on the estate, and had paid a year’s grazing on that number. He looked very perplexed, and was obviously uncertain whether I intended buying or not.

I toyed with the pages of the day-book on my desk as I waited for the medicine to take effect (I am getting very mixed in my metaphors!); then, with a gesture of complete surprise, I put my finger on an entry in the book and said:

“But, what’s this I see? You paid grazing for only five hundred and twenty head only last month. What a silly mistake!”

I took up a pen and made a new entry, talking aloud as I did so, slowly and deliberately.

“Señor Juan Largo—one hundred and sixty head of grazing not charged for—at four pesos per annum—is six hundred and forty pesos owing.”

I looked up at his distressed fat face, smiled my sweetest, and said:

"I'm sorry about that, Largo. I'm sometimes careless with my book-keeping."

For the first time I saw that he began to respect me, as these people only do if one outwits them. He couldn't bluster, because if he now declared that he only had five hundred and twenty head on the estate, and we were likely to buy the whole herd at one hundred pesos per head, without being able to count them accurately, he would lose heavily. He therefore did just what I had hoped. He changed the subject to the question of purchase of his bullock wagons.

I pretended to have lost interest, but after another hour's argument I bought the whole lot at twenty-five per cent. less than we were prepared to pay for them. Then, to prevent any relapse, I turned back the pages of my day-book to the previous year's entry of his grazing account and remarked that a similar mistake in numbers seemed to have occurred. He was so anxious to escape further complications—and so was I—that we let the matter drop.

As I haven't the smallest intention of buying his beef cattle, I am delighted to have obtained payment for at least one year's grazing for what is probably the correct number of animals.

Rather cute, eh? Am I becoming crooked?

Anyhow, Mr. Juan Largo now raises his hat to me in the most respectful manner, but he hates me more than ever, I feel.

MIDWIFE, DOCTOR, SURGEON AND JUDGE

No. 43

Miraflores

THERE being no doctor within two or three days' reach of us here, I have had some queer jobs to do. In fact, I have very nearly been a midwife on more than one occasion, as these funny people seem to think that I can do anything for them in their troubles.

The number of knife wounds that I have sewn and bound

up is incredible. Scarcely a Sunday morning that I haven't at least two such casualties to attend to. I have found that it is quite hopeless to try to stop this fighting by direct means, and now I can sleep through the most violent fracas on a Saturday night and leave them to fight it out.

What I am doing with some success, is to teach these silly, but really kindly fellows, some other interest for their spare time than in getting drunk and fighting—for they never fight unless drunk.

Most of them had never seen potatoes growing until a few months ago when a garden, which I had established for myself, started producing. They had never seen or even heard of cabbage or lettuce; peas or runner beans only in tins. Many of them were very much interested, particularly when I gave them some to eat.

Then I began to fence off little plots round the huts of some of them, and soon they asked for seeds to start gardens of their own. The number of such gardens increases each week and drinking is correspondingly reduced.

But about surgery. The limit was reached this morning when a fellow came across from the saw-mill and presented himself at my office door. In his left hand he held the forefinger of his right hand, which he had completely severed in a band-saw. Quite cheerfully he asked me to fix it on again for him! His distress when I said it was impossible seemed to be more disappointment at my incapacity than in the loss of his finger!

I tied him up securely and expected him to go home and lie down. A couple of hours later I was astonished to see him working at the saw-bench as cheerfully as ever, with a bloody bandage smothered with saw-dust!

And he is not a piece-worker either!

A week or two ago, on a Sunday morning, a fellow was waiting to be patched up, who had his cheek so slashed that his back teeth showed through the gaping wound. As he waited on my veranda he was eating a paste quite happily!

They stop bleeding very effectively with a handful of soil mixed with red pepper. Why they don't get septic I can't imagine, but they never do.

I have had a lot of legal business to deal with recently in my capacity of *Comisario*. My district includes some neighbouring properties where a dispute has arisen over the title-deeds of some land: a much more serious business to the authorities than a mere killing or two.

It appears that during the many revolutions that have occurred in this country the new, and often very temporary, governments have issued new title-deeds on land to their sympathisers, without troubling to consult the existing owners of earlier deeds, so that a man whose family has been in peaceful occupation of a bit of land for centuries may suddenly be confronted by a stranger with titles to the same estate.

Such a case I have been dealing with recently. It is quite outside my jurisdiction, but before the dispute can be considered by higher authority I have to take all the evidence or testimony of everyone concerned—and in triplicate—and send it to the law courts in Salta, where it will be decided whether the case is worthy of their deliberations.

God help them when they see my efforts at producing reams of legal evidence—in Spanish!

I have settled numerous disputes about the ownership of animals, but they are simpler. Every animal bears its owner's private brand, and one becomes quite expert in recognizing when a brand has been altered by burning in another on top of it, or by adding a touch here and there.

Some silly fellows even shave a line or two around the old brand in the hope of deceiving the real owner. It works all right until the real owner is able to catch the thief near my office, then the animal is brought before me for a decision about its rightful ownership, and the altered brand is easily detected.

I believe I should have a record of all the branded saddle horses and mules in my district; a sort of register showing the colour and markings of all of them. But no such record exists and it would be too big a task to begin it now.

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I have been having some mild attacks of malaria recently, not enough to be very troublesome and very unlike the West African variety, yet quite unpleasant. The locals get it rather

badly at times, and I have a big supply of quinine and phenacetin which I make up into capsules for them.

My office is at times like a doctor's consulting-room, and I am expected to know about everybody's ailments; very embarrassing when women come to describe their intimate complaints.

I have a big medical book as guide, from which I read out various symptoms until we get as good a match as possible. Then I prescribe the nearest remedy to that given in the book; seldom anything like it really, but there are certain golden rules about classes of drugs in each case, so that I can't go far wrong.

I have discovered that a bottle of flavoured water, given with a great deal of assurance, does more good than a doubtful hesitation with the most costly physic.

A combination of advanced pregnancy and malaria is difficult to deal with. My medical book doesn't deal with such complications, except to say that quinine and phenacetin are amongst the drugs not to be given during pregnancy. You can't bluff a delirious woman with a temperature of a hundred and three or so, so coloured water is quite useless.

However, they are a very tough people these, and their babies are born quite successfully in the end. I suspect they only bother me because it amuses them to have me fussing around when anyone is ill.

At times I get very tired of it all, and long for the company of my own race and less primitive surroundings. I haven't spoken English for about a year now, except to the dogs occasionally.

I tried to get Angela to learn it, but she showed no aptitude and we soon gave it up.

Talking of the dogs. The St. Bernard has gone. He belonged to the late manager here, and he turned up one day and claimed his dog, who showed the greatest reluctance to go with him and had to be led away on a rope.

Chila has another litter of puppies. I kept one of her first litter and called him *Chispa*—or Spark in English. A few days ago I found Chispa, now nearly full grown, lying amongst the new puppies and feeding from his mother very contentedly and mother making no sort of objection. Quite unique in dog habits, I should say; perhaps a local custom.

The oil well goes down steadily, but it is a boring job in both senses.

The thud, thud, thud of the rocking-bar is most monotonous, it shakes this house.

Nothing interesting has come out of the hole yet, and we are down about four hundred feet. I don't feel we shall find anything valuable. Perhaps I'm depressed. This malaria hanging about in one's system has that effect. The damp summer air is anything but bracing, with a continuous temperature about a hundred in the shade, and rain every day.

I am longing to climb higher into these mountain ranges, up above the timber line, if only there were any sort of job to be found there, which there isn't.

I have heard of a big English estate to the north of here, in the next province, where a lot of Englishmen are employed in sugar plantations. I find myself thinking a lot about it, but there is the problem of Angela. Her devotion is steadfast, and I hate to think what she would say if I talked of leaving her, yet I couldn't possibly take her amongst a lot of English people.

Yes, I've got into a state of melancholy, which means that a change is not far off, so be prepared to call me a rolling stone once more.

Despite wire gauze doors to each room, innumerable flying creatures get into this house. Great horned beetles, weighing several ounces, with legs and wings that emit awful grinding noises, are frequent visitors. The queer Praying-Mentis, a thing that looks like a few inches of bright green twig, and which I knew so well on the Gold Coast, is another. The darned things sit up on my books or on the ink-pot and wave their silly green arms, sometimes as if boxing and sometimes as if praying, and all the while looking at me as though they are trying to signal some message from their own mysterious world.

Then there are the queerest little pink lizards—no, most emphatically, I have not got D.T.'s—that look like scraps of raw veal and which crawl slowly about the walls and ceiling. They feed on the little silver insects, rather like shrimps in shape, which exist here in millions and feed on paper. If one isn't careful, they will soon consume the ledgers and all one's

correspondence. I am not certain whether I am on the side of the shrimps or the pink lizards.

It would take volumes to describe all the other varieties of insects and reptiles which pester one here, and I am no naturalist.

RAILWAY DISASTER

No. 44

Miraflores

I'VE been in serious trouble since my last letter.

For a few days I thought I might see the inside of a prison once more unless I could raise a thousand pounds.

This is what happened.

I had an order to despatch several truck-loads of quebracho logs. (Quebracho is the very hard wood I told you of. Its bark is used for making some sort of extract for tanning leather.) These logs were to be sent as cut in the forest; just round tree trunks with bark complete, not squared logs as usual. They weighed from about one to five tons each.

They were easy to load on the railway trucks, as we just rolled them up on skids with the aid of ropes. They were held in place on the trucks by big uprights stuck in the sides, and by big chains lashed tight over the load.

The day after the trucks had left our siding by the station the station-master telephoned me frantically that there had been a terrible catastrophe; that when my wagons were passing over a bridge on the line a displaced log had caught the parapet of the bridge and demolished a great length of it and sent four wagons into the river below and also completely blocked the line.

Fortunately no one was hurt, but the railway people—it is a government line—said that I was personally responsible for the damage done, which would amount to about a thousand pounds.

I was struck dumb for a while. I hung up the receiver with a trembling hand (the malaria has got me badly and didn't help), and contemplated mounting a horse and riding away up to the high ranges, where no such things as railways exist.

Then I drank too much whisky and went to bed to shiver and sweat and mumble delirious absurdities for several hours, with Angela trying to soothe me while my teeth chattered madly. I felt that all my hard work here, all my pride in what I have achieved, had led only to ruin.

The next morning, washed out and very shaky, I rode to the station to discuss the matter with the station-master. He is usually a suave individual and quite helpful, but now I found him very aggressive and truculent. He raved and shouted about my incompetence and the ignorance of all *gringos*—as I have explained, an insulting term for foreigners.

He told me that I should have a summons from the railway very soon and that if I did not pay the damage immediately, I should go to prison.

I shouted back at him until I felt my temperature rising and my teeth beginning to chatter again in the absurd way they do with malaria. Somehow I rode home, with a green fog of malaria blotting out all vision. Fortunately I had two of my men with me and they held me in my saddle.

A couple of days later, after much angry telephoning, a paper arrived from the station-master demanding the sum of ten thousand pesos—nearly a thousand pounds!

Feeling really ill, I was unable to cope with the problem alone, so I called a conference of my most trusted helpers.

Manuel Palavecino wasn't there, as he was away in the forest, so I had my old foreman, the saw-mill mechanic, and Caturelli, the blacksmith, the only ones who can read and write usefully. I showed them the demand I had received and said that, as I couldn't possibly pay it I should probably be going to prison.

They were very kind and sympathetic and begged me to telegraph to Don Diego. That I couldn't do, as I felt the matter was entirely my fault for not having more carefully supervised the securing of the logs. It seemed mean to squeal for help. Also I felt certain that Don Diego would refuse to pay such a penalty for my ignorance. (I couldn't telephone to him to discuss the matter, as our line only goes to the station and has no connection with the outside world.)

Presently I noticed that old Caturelli's blue eyes were smiling. His curly grey hair and whiskers seemed to join in the joke.

"What the hell are you grinning about?" I demanded, rude for the first time to the dear old fellow.

"At you, *Patron*."

"Then please explain why."

He glanced round the office at the many files I have hanging on the wall.

"Will you allow me to look at this?" he asked, pointing to one marked "Bills of lading."

I gave him permission and wondered. He took the first bill of lading from the file, turned it over, and spent a long while reading the mass of instructions and regulations printed on the back of it in very small type. His smile broadened as he read and we watched him. Then a big, gnarled finger indicated a certain paragraph, as he said:

"Please read that, *Patron*."

His tone and manner were so confident that my hopes rose at once. I read the words he indicated, which said:

"Before any loaded wagons are accepted for despatch by the railway, the station-master shall examine such wagons and before signing a bill of lading shall ascertain that all goods or livestock are in all respects properly loaded according to the regulations laid down in instructions to station-masters."

When I finished reading I looked at Caturelli, who still smiled gently.

"Now look at the other side, *Patron*."

I turned over the paper and at once realized that I held the station-master's signature for receipt of all the wagons that had caused the trouble.

"But what about this demand?" I asked, pointing to the ominous document.

"Just a bluff, *Patron*. That station-master is in trouble with the management of the railway for not properly checking the loading and securing of those wagons. He hopes to save himself by getting you to pay for the damage."

"But I can't prove that. It won't help matters by putting the blame on him if the railway insists on me paying."

"All you have to do is to go to that telephone and tell the station-master that you have read these regulations; that you have his receipt for the wagons and that when the head office

of the railways asks to see that receipt you will be glad to show it to them."

After a moment's hesitation, I did as Caturelli suggested, with the result that ten minutes' rather acrimonious talk on the 'phone with the station-master ended with his asking me pleadingly if I wouldn't pay something—perhaps about fifty pounds—towards the damage in order to help him to plead his case with the management. His voice was so unctuous and his words so servile after the rude way in which he had spoken to me before, that I was furious to think how his bluff had frightened me.

I was about to tell him to go to hell, when I remembered that he had to bear the brunt of what was certainly my carelessness, so I contented myself with saying that I could accept no liability whatever, at which he hung up his end of the telephone.

So I am well out of what might have been a disaster but for old Caturelli.

We celebrated the occasion in a bottle of Chianti. I did tell you he is an Italian, didn't I? And we English think we are so much cleverer!

I can't find out anything of Caturelli's history or why such a capable man should be content to remain in this place. Probably he is an outlaw, as most of my men seem to be.

GOLD AND PORCUPINES

No. 45

Miraflores

GOLD!

To be the discoverer of a new gold mine in a part of the world where the precious metal has never been found before is a wonderful sensation.

Fame, fortune, freedom, all seem to lie at the feet of anyone who discovers such a mine; and that I have done!

A few weeks ago I was laconically panning out the day's

samples of the mud which is sucked up from our bore-hole, when the event happened.

I had become so tired of finding nothing of the least interest that I was on the point of throwing away the sediment in the pan, when I noticed a new sign which interested me.

Instead of the usual residue of fine gravel as the heaviest, and therefore remaining, substance at the bottom edge of the pan, I saw a line of very fine black sand, almost like coal-dust. I studied it carefully and realised that it couldn't be crushed coal, as that wouldn't be heavy enough to remain to the last.

Then I gasped as I saw something else through the film of water shaking over the black sand—a thin line of yellow metal still lower than the black stuff.

At once I knew it was gold. It could be nothing else.

Very carefully I took it into the office and separated it from everything else and collected it on a sheet of white paper, where it gleamed delightfully, but looked a very small amount when scraped together. I was almost afraid to breathe lest I might blow it away. The little heap was not much bigger than a mosquito's wing, but infinitely exciting to see.

I found myself looking craftily out of the doors and windows of the office lest someone might come and discover the tremendous secret.

I realized at once how important it was that no one should know of the discovery until Don Diego arrived. I had visions of a gold-rush, with thousands of frantic people stampeding into the valley to stake claims, commit murder, and do all the other wild things that go with the discovery of gold. Cautiously I put my find to the prescribed test and found that I had made no mistake.

Then to let Don Diego know. I was about to send him a telegram, when I realized that we had no code and that to telegraph from the station that I had found gold would be to start the stampede immediately.

Our one-horse telephone goes nowhere except to the station, where there is no other telephone connection to anywhere.

I thought of telegraphing, "Come at once, urgent," or something like that, but, knowing Don Diego, I realized that no such message would bring him here without further explanation.

He would know that if I had found oil I would say so, as everyone knows that we are boring for it, and oil doesn't start a national stampede as gold does. Nothing for it but a letter and patience and, meanwhile, to collect more gold and let no soul know about it.

I immediately scribbled an excited note saying that I had discovered gold and that he should come immediately. Then I galloped all the way to the station and gave the letter—registered—to the guard on the train.

Arrived back here, I had to concoct reasons for keeping every ounce of mud drawn out of the well. I said that I had had a telegram from Don Diego, that he was not satisfied with my analysis and reports, and was coming up to make his own tests. We prepared a big wooden tank to hold the spoil of several days' work.

That explanation gave me a good reason for panning out more samples every hour or so, as if I was trying to make sure that Don Diego should not find I had been negligent.

My store of gold didn't increase very fast during the three days my letter took to reach Buenos Aires. I, perhaps, added a leg to the mosquito's wing. But gold is gold, and where there's a little there must be more; merely a matter of sinking a proper shaft and finding the reef or vein and then selling out for a colossal sum.

Then came a telegram from Don Diego.

Only two words, but they made me very angry. "What assay?"

What assay, indeed! What an ass, I said. Gold, I had told him, real yellow gold, and all he can do is to telegraph "What assay?"

And I had only a vague idea of what "assay" meant. I looked it up in the dictionary and also in my book on minerals. Then my spirits began to droop.

The little scrap of gold-dust looked absurdly insignificant on the sheet of white paper when compared with the great heap of mud which I had washed to obtain even that amount.

Anxiously I took my medicine scales and very carefully weighed it. I had no weight small enough to balance my treasure, so cut up little squares of paper instead and so arrived

at the fraction of my smallest apothecary's weight, or whatever it is.

The result was most disappointing. Though I hadn't weighed the mud from which I had extracted the gold it was obvious, even to my simple mind, that the proportion was very far from being of the slightest value as a gold mining proposition, particularly as my guide book said that gold in such small proportions may be found almost anywhere.

But I couldn't abandon my glorious hopes without further investigation, so I had a lot more mud brought from the heap that has been accumulating for months and washed it once more, but without result.

For the next two days I did little else but wash samples of mud as it came from the shaft, but not another sign of gold did I find.

A second telegram from Don Diego reminded me that I had not replied to his first one, so I carefully folded the tiny bit of gold dust in a sheet of paper and added a letter to say that it was all I could find in what seemed to be several tons of mud.

My dreams of great wealth were finally dispersed when we had a serious breakdown in the boring machinery, which means waiting for new parts. Whether they are obtainable in Buenos Aires or must come from U.S.A. I don't yet know.

.

In the meantime, instead of fortune, I am being kept short of money for essential work. Don Diego seems to be in difficulties again. His letters, recently, have suggested that he may sell the whole estate if he can find a buyer.

It is impossible to get any more good timber within a day's journey from the mill, so the bullock trucks go out one day and back the next, adding greatly to costs. It means also that I have to spend many nights camping far up in the hills, which is no joke with malaria such as I now have.

Every four days, at almost exactly four o'clock in the afternoon, I feel the icy shiver get hold of me. My teeth play the castanet game for half an hour or so before I begin to scorch with fever. I go to bed and cover myself with six blankets, swallow pints of water, when my chattering teeth permit, and

by midnight am swamped with sweat which soaks right through the mattress.

All very unpleasant while it lasts, but the following morning I am able to carry on normally, though a little weaker and thinner after each attack.

As long as they maintain their present regularity they needn't disturb me much, as I can adjust my work accordingly, but I shouldn't like to be caught unexpectedly when away up in the forest one night.

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Yesterday I was riding not far from here, and had Chila with me, when we saw a porcupine cross the path. Chila, of course, attacked but was wise enough not to rush in at once, and tore round and round the queer creature barking excitedly. The porcupine paid little attention and pretended to be sniffing at something on the ground as it waddled slowly away.

Presently, when Chila was a clear three feet away from it and barking at its back, she suddenly let out a squeal of pain and ran back to me for help. I saw, with great surprise, that she had one of the porcupine's spikes stuck into her nose. I had to dismount to withdraw it.

There seems to be no doubt that that strange animal actually ejected the spike, like an arrow, from its back with considerable force.

A toucan flies over this house each evening at about the same time and always in the same direction. What absurd birds they are. Even in an aviary they look ridiculous, but flying overhead, with that vast orange beak twice the size of their meagre brown bodies and with most inadequate wings, they compel one to think that the Creator had a great sense of humour. Perhaps the first toucan was a Paul Pry in Eden and was punished for having intruded his nose where it wasn't wanted.

They are evidently very solitary birds.

Why, I wonder, with all eternity before Him, did the Creator attempt to make the world in six days? What might have been accomplished in a fortnight?

MORE MURDER

No. 46

Miraflores

I WAS riding home from Agua Verde on Sunday afternoon, when, at the bottom of the hill at the lower end of this valley, I was much surprised to see all the women and children, including Angela, collected in a group waiting for me.

They told me there had been a terrible fight in the village and that they were afraid to go back until I came.

I galloped home at top speed and noticed that there were very few men to be seen anywhere. One or two sat about at the doors of their huts and looked at me in a rather queer way as I passed.

On the veranda of my bungalow I found the body of an Indian—one of two of the Chiriguano tribe from Bolivia that I recently employed, cheerful fellows and good workers. He was horribly wounded on his head and hands and still held his knife, and had obviously died fighting.

I went round to the back of the house to tie up my horse and there, right beside my back door, was the body of the other Indian, equally badly gashed.

Feeling very scared, I went to look for Caturelli or someone reliable to tell me what had happened. I found that all the steady fellows were away up the river fishing and the store was shut. Only a few of the wilder axemen and bullock drivers were about.

I interrogated them, but could get no word from them about who were the culprits. They were all more or less drunk, and were in a sulky mood and replied that the men who had done the killing had gone off to their camps in the hills.

It is quite hopeless to try to get anything out of these fellows when they don't want to talk. Either loyalty to each other or fear of revenge, makes them obstinately dumb on an occasion like this. Moreover, I am a bit behind with their wages lately, as I can't get the money regularly, and that has made them surly and discontented.

All they would say was that they all hated the Indians (strange, since they are all little better than half-breeds themselves), who had insulted everyone and started the fight.

I can prove nothing. Not one of my trustworthy men saw anything of the battle. Angela says that ten or a dozen men were attacking the Indians when she and the other women ran away from what they knew would be a far more serious affair than most of the fights here.

It looks as if these poor Indian fellows, when hard pressed, had sought refuge at my bungalow and had died fighting on the doorstep.

God, I'm tired of it all! I feel so helpless amongst this crowd of outlaws. They are nice enough fellows in some ways and good workers, but just under the skin is a sort of savagery that is horrible. I feel I can't really trust any of them, except old Caturelli. Palavecino is a grand fellow, but he is a real *gaucho* and, as I already know, is quite capable of killing when he feels it is necessary according to his ideas of justice.

I realized, suddenly, that Angela, for all her devotion to me, is of the same blood, a mixture of the ancient Spanish conquistadores, (who, if history can be believed, were monsters of cruelty) and the savage Indians whom they conquered.

I felt that it would be impossible to stay here much longer, living, as I do, so much in contact with the people and with no other companionship anywhere.

I have written to Don Diego to say that I must either have an English assistant manager, or I must resign my job.

You may think I am funking, and perhaps I am, but it is not so much the danger and the loneliness and the fever, as the feeling that my whole nature will become demoralized if I stay here much longer.

A week or two ago I was at the station when the train came in from the north. I went on board to get an iced drink and some fresh butter from the restaurant car and there found two very jolly Englishmen on their way to England, on leave from the sugar plantations in the next province. They were obviously celebrating the event and, recognizing me as a fellow-countryman, they invited me to join them in a drink.

Believe it or not, I found that my English was so out of

practice that the right words would not come to my lips. I spoke a stupid mixture of Spanish and English, and felt very ridiculous. More than anything it made me feel how far from everything decent I have been drifting in the last two years.

So don't blame me if you hear that I have moved on once more.

This morning my eye was caught by a queer little eruption in the sandy earth outside my house. I bent down and saw a cone-shaped pit, a couple of inches wide, from the bottom of which incessant little spouts of sand were being thrown up. An ant was struggling to climb out of the pit and always he was frustrated by a spout of loose fine sand. Presently I saw him disappear into a small hole in the bottom of the pit. I took a bit of stick and unearthed a funny little beetle under the hole, with the ant tightly held in his claws.

Perhaps the most unpleasant insect (it should be classified as a reptile, I feel) which we have here in abundance is the tarantula spider and his many relatives. Great hairy monsters, which, in the moonlight, might be mistaken for kittens crawling on the ground. I believe their bite can be fatal. They have one bitter enemy, a huge hornet whose local name is *San Jorge* (anglice St. George). Rather a compliment to our national saint, because he invariably vanquishes his enemy. It is quite common to see one of these hornets, as big as a humming bird, attacking a tarantula. The latter squats back on his haunches, with all his spare legs on the defensive, while the hornet dives at him again and again and, I imagine, gets under his guard with his sting. Such a battle lasts for several minutes and is very thrilling to watch. I have never seen a *San Jorge* attempt to eat the tarantula, which he invariably kills. Perhaps, like his namesake, he is a saintly benefactor.

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A ROLLING STONE ROLLS ON

No. 47

Miraflores

ABOUT a hundred miles north-west of here, in the province of Jujuy—pronounced Hoohooey—there is a wonderful valley between two ranges of the Andes, hundreds of square miles of fertile flat land watered by a big river.

All this valley, and much of the country beyond, belongs to an English family which settled there some thirty years ago. There are wide sugar plantations, a sugar factory, cattle and horse-breeding estates, fruit farms, lumber works, and many other industries, all of them managed by Englishmen.

I was there last week and was entertained in magnificent style at the Sala, as they call the headquarters residence where the owners of the estates live: hot baths, running water, electric light, dress for dinner, servants everywhere, tennis courts, a swimming bath, a squash court, ice, bacon, white-skinned Englishwomen and children, and, in fact, everything that anyone could want.

I had no idea that anything so delightfully civilized could exist so near this savage place. It only shows how crude are the means of communication that I should have heard only a vague rumour of such an oasis in the surrounding jungle. (Do jungles have oases?)

And, there, I have been offered a job!

As soon as I can get away from here I go there to take the temporary management of a plantation while the permanent man goes to England for six months. After that, if I do well, I am told that I may get the permanent management of another plantation in the place of a man who is retiring.

So what now about rolling stones and me being a failure?

It seems that though I have been lost in this wilderness for two years, I have been talked about outside. The efforts I have made here have not been unsuccessful, and I suppose there are

people who take note of any increasing industry round about and who find out who is responsible.

Mr. Walter Leach, one of the four brothers who own the estates I am going to, seemed to know all about me and to consider me capable of taking a manager's job straight off. I was mightily flattered, as you can imagine, and particularly delighted to think that my time here has not been wasted.

Then I found that two of the Englishmen that I met in Tucuman when I first arrived there, four years ago nearly, are working with Leach & Co., in the headquarters offices. It is no doubt due to them that my history in this country is known there, as, apparently, they have been taking quite an interest in my career.

So now I am impatiently waiting to hear when Don Diego is to send someone to take over this job and set me free. He says he may be coming here himself for a while. I only hope he comes soon.

The one matter which troubles me is what will happen to poor Angela. She well realized that it would be impossible for her to go with me to a colony of Englishmen, many of whom have their wives and families there, but she evidently thinks that I should be content to stay here for ever, or at least find another job where she could always be with me.

I feel a complete brute about it and know that I have been shamefully selfish to let her think that our partnership might be permanent. But what can one do in such circumstances? I may be wrong, but I feel certain that the passionate affection she has given me will burn itself out as soon as I leave her and probably flare up just as quickly for someone else. It is impossible for Englishmen to understand the real natures of the women here (or anywhere else, for that matter), but, to coin a proverb, fierce fires burn fast, and if the fuel is lacking such fires must quickly die out.

I have told Angela that I am giving her a sum of money which must seem like a fortune to her simple needs—though it isn't much from what I have saved—and will certainly be a fine dowry in the eyes of any suitor. But she refuses to be consoled by any such suggestions and has made me almost equally unhappy.

I am determined, however, brutal as it seems, to sever a tie which I now see—being more mature, I suppose—may well ruin my whole life if maintained any longer.

The remorse and distress I am experiencing might be an object lesson to other silly fellows who are tempted to do as I have done, so, if you know of any young men likely to go abroad, you can tell them of my troubles.

On the other hand, there are far worse troubles one can get into in this country. The towns are full of temptations for men who try to live monastic lives. Few of them are able to resist completely, with the result that disease has wrecked many fine lives. Thank God I have escaped that horror and I can only hope that Angela will soon forget me. I also hope that I may some day forget her, but I have a feeling that she will remain vividly in my mind as long as I live, for I cannot conceive how any educated Englishwoman, such as I hope to marry some day, could give her husband anything like the unselfish devotion that I have experienced from Angela.

It is not good for any Englishman to possess a woman so completely that even a dog could not equal her unhesitating compliance with his every thought and wish.

Could one go away and leave a very devoted dog without feeling an utter brute?

Well, this is far worse than that.

Imagine that the dog knew that you were leaving it deliberately and could talk.

No, its eyes would be eloquent enough. Angela's eyes are even more so.

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The malaria hasn't been so bad recently. I get the attacks just as regularly, but they are less severe every time. I hope that a complete change of air will get rid of them entirely.

PART THREE

A NEW LIFE

No. 48

Plaza Hotel, Salta

I HAVE said farewell to Miraflores and am staying here for a few days' holiday while buying some new clothes.

My departure was not easy. Don Diego seemed to think that I had no right whatever to leave him, but ended by giving me a very nice letter as testimonial, and rather more commission than I expected.

Angela was wonderfully understanding, but the less I say about her the better. Whatever sorrow I have caused her cannot be more than my own, when I realize that I shall probably never see her again.

But life must be lived according to definite rules. Those who transgress must suffer, and I am paying the price of my transgression.

Nothing for it but to plunge into the new life ahead of me and try to forget the past.

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A band is playing in the plaza outside. There are interesting people in this hotel to talk to and the prospect of a gay night before me. I am on holiday, therefore forgive a brief letter.

The thought occurs to me that the long letters I have always written to you have been due to loneliness and an urgent need to express myself in English to someone.

Perhaps in future, with English people to talk to, my letters may be far less voluminous, for which you may be thankful.

SUGAR PLANTER

No. 49

San Antonio, Jujuy

HERE I am, in a magnificent bungalow, with a red-tiled roof, wide verandas, and a lovely garden. Ice is sent to me every day from the sugar factory, about three miles away. There is a well of the purest water in my patio, instead of the river water I have been accustomed to. I have a good manservant, always in white linen, and a lot of other oddments, such as gardener, cook, cook's mate, washerwoman, etc., all provided by the company.

I don't know the first thing about sugar plantations, and have many hundreds of acres of sugar-cane ripe for harvest.

The manager gave me a very rough outline of the work I have to do, then departed for England.

But there is a most capable foreman, who has been here for years. He is obviously willing to help me in any way he can. Also there are the Leach brothers and other managers at the headquarters to refer to in any difficulty. And difficulties there certainly will be for me. Some of them rather startling and interesting.

To begin with, there is an Indian tribal war brewing all round me: real Red Indians of pure blood—or I should say, unmixed blood, as I can't imagine any blood being more impure.

They don't live in these parts, but come from far away in a wild country of swamps and jungles called the Chaco, which occupies a large part of Argentine, Bolivia and Paraguay. Every year several tribes, totalling some thousands, come to these plantations to harvest the sugar-cane crop.

Here I have several hundred of the Mataco tribe, and on the adjoining plantation there are as many Tobas. A dirtier, smellier lot of half-naked savages one can't imagine; reddish-brown of skin—where one can see it for dirt—with lank black hair, lean jaws and fierce eyes. The Tobas have the lobes of their ears distended with great wooden rings. When not working they wear extraordinary costumes of odds and ends of old uniform

jackets with a length of gay-coloured cloth tied round their waists as a kind of skirt. Those who don't possess hats wear a gay handkerchief round their heads. They are a muscular, athletic-looking mob. I don't know why, as they are horribly lazy and will only work at all if paid by results.

Apparently fighting is one of their forms of exercise and the Tobas and Matacos are ancient enemies. The former seldom come in for the sugar harvest and now they have declared war on the Matacos—or are to continue a war which started before they left the Chaco.

I have been warned that the affair may blaze up at any moment into violence and that they will then attack each other with bows and arrows and a few old gas-pipe guns which they possess. Exciting, eh?

Up to the present there has not been more than an occasional long range exchange of arrows, which have done no harm, and a great deal of angry shouting all night to the accompaniment of tom-toms.

I hear that a detachment of cavalry from the capital of the province is on its way here to be on guard in case of serious trouble—or to prevent it.

So I seem to be in for trouble again; but I rather enjoy the prospect of excitement, particularly with such good quarters to live in and good food to eat, and with many very nice Englishmen within a few miles. All great fun.

Until the sugar-cane harvest starts these Indians are employed on clearing forest for extending the plantations. They don't like the work and apparently are always troublesome during this waiting period. When harvest begins they settle down to steady work, so I hear.

They are not paid with money, but with metal discs for each task which is set them. At the end of the week they bring their discs to the office and the total is marked on a paper which each man, or woman, or child—for they all work—carries in a short length of bamboo.

They are given a very small amount of money each week and also rations every day. If they are paid in cash they promptly spend it all on drink.

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We harvest next week, so I must hope that these rascals don't have a bad battle before then, as they might kill too many and we need every pair of hands we can get.

The harvest lasts for several months and is a very busy time. Even now I find I have to get up at quarter past four every morning in order to divide up the gangs of men for the various jobs that must be done!

By the time they are all despatched, and have walked to their work, it is just daylight. They are set tasks which they usually complete about one or two p.m., and then—normally—would sleep all the afternoon. Now they get on with their shouting and tom-tom beating.

About five-thirty each morning, when all the gangs have been supplied with tools and sent off to work, I mount my horse and ride round to see everything going smoothly and get back here about eight o'clock, have a bath, breakfast, then an hour or so of office work, and into the saddle again until one o'clock, when I get back for lunch.

After lunch a siesta—a real sleep—until three o'clock, then around the plantation again to plan the next day's work with the foreman until about five or six.

Quite a long day in this climate, though I hear that when harvest starts I shall have many more hours to put in, as we load cane day and night in order to keep the mills working continuously. All very interesting.

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I am feeling very well now and the malaria has almost entirely disappeared. There are two English doctors at headquarters, so that I can get any treatment necessary if I get any more attacks; also an English chaplain if I need burying!

On Sundays I lunch at the Sala, then play polo (did I tell you there is a polo ground?), then into the swimming bath, glorious rum cocktails with ice, dinner, a chat with the bosses about work and all sorts of things, or a rubber of bridge, and then ride home again.

All wonderfully pleasant, and you can't think how I enjoy it all.

The very early rising is a bit trying at first, but no doubt I shall get accustomed to it.



BOLIVIAN INDIANS.



CORRALS AND HOMES OF VAQUEROS IN NORTHERN ARGENTINE.



BOLIVIAN MOUNTAIN INDIANS.



MOUNTAIN WOMEN FEELING THE COLD.

Very strange to see the hundreds of villainous Indian faces lit up by the light of lanterns which foremen carry as they separate the gangs for various jobs. I don't get too close to the creatures as their smell is very powerful. I stand about in the offing and try to look intelligent while the excellent head foreman gives his orders.

The natural courtesy of these Argentines is really wonderful. The tact with which this foreman lets me think I am managing the plantation, knowing well that I know nothing whatever about the work, is superb.

"If you approve, Señor, I will do so and so," is the way he puts it. I screw up my face as though thinking, then give my assent.

They don't call me *Patron* here, as they realize that I am only a temporary man, their real *Patron* being on leave.

INDIAN BATTLE. BOWS AND ARROWS

No. 50

San Antonio

WE have had the battle!

Not many Englishmen can say that they have been under the fire of bows and arrows from real Red Indians as I have. It is true that the arrows weren't aimed at me, but they fell all about me, so there isn't a great deal of difference.

Last Monday the expected detachment of cavalry arrived, about twenty troopers under a lieutenant, and were quartered on me. The lieutenant had a room in my house and the men slept in outhouses. They were only here two nights and only slept one of them, for on the second night the battle took place. Perhaps the arrival of the cavalry expedited matters between the warring tribes, who may have felt that their sport would be interfered with if they delayed too long. Actually, very little harm was done, and though there are a few less Indians, I think it is quite likely they have bolted back to the bush.

The whole thing was really very funny, and I don't know when I have been more amused.

The lieutenant and I had spent the evening together, chatting and listening to the shouting (war cries would be more dramatic perhaps) of the Indians and the furious beating of their tom-toms. As it was little more noisy than on previous nights I wasn't a bit anxious. The lieutenant was actually a lot more concerned than I was, for he had never encountered any savages before, having spent all his short life in the capital of the Province, living luxuriously no doubt.

We went to bed about ten o'clock.

At about midnight I woke to find my foreman standing by my bed, and saw that he carried two heavy long-lashed whips.

Then I heard the queerest noises outside.

The shouting and tom-toms had ceased except for an occasional shrill yell, but I couldn't make out the frequent whistling noises about the house, which ended always with a thud.

The accompaniment of gun-shots and the calm announcement of the foreman told me that the battle had begun.

I jumped up, and hurried into my clothes.

"What is that strange noise I hear just outside?" I inquired. "Those whistling sounds?"

"Arrows, sir," replied the foreman with a grin.

"But why on earth are they firing at this house? I'm not in the battle, I hope."

"No, sir, but they are firing over each other's heads, as they usually do, and their arrows are falling this way."

"Well, what are we going to do? Have the soldiers gone out?"

"Not yet, sir. They're preparing to go now, but you'll do much more good than they will, sir."

There was a note in his voice which told me that he hadn't a great respect for the soldiery. Yet I wasn't a bit reassured by his statement that I might do some good, particularly as I heard a couple of arrows hit the roof with a bang which proved they were no trifling missiles.

However, the foreman was quite unperturbed, so I could do no more than hide any anxiety I felt.

When I had pulled on my boots, we stood for a few minutes

on the back veranda while waiting for my horse, which the foreman had sent for, to arrive. There was a full moon and it illuminated a queer little comedy taking place in the patio. The detachment of cavalry were adjusting the girths of their horses and were evidently ready to mount as soon as the order was given.

Then I saw that the lieutenant and his sergeant were in the midst of an argument. They seemed to possess only one horse between them for some reason and were alternately mounting it and pulling each other off again.

"No, my lieutenant," pleaded the sergeant, "you must let me face the enemy. You must not expose your valuable young life to such dangers, please."

The lieutenant reluctantly allowed himself to be pulled out of the saddle, then wrung his hands in dismay for a moment before deciding not to be deprived of all honour and glory. The sergeant meanwhile mounted and inquired of the troop if they were ready.

Then it was the lieutenant's turn. He grabbed the horse's bridle and commanded the sergeant to dismount, adding a long and flowery speech about the glory of facing the fire of the savages for the honour of his country.

The troopers looked on, grinning and lighting cigarettes, while this dispute went on.

The arrival of my horse prevented me from seeing the end of it. Alva, the foreman, guffawed at the contesting officers as he put the big whip in my hand.

"They'll be arguing that matter all night, sir," he remarked as we mounted, "but they are better away from this trouble, for we don't want any killing. If you'll come with me and use your whip we'll soon stop this *bochinche*" (perhaps "rumpus" is the only translation).

With that we galloped out of the gate and round the house towards the Indian encampment.

Alva took no sort of notice of any arrows, so I could only hope that none would hit him, as I should have felt very helpless without his guidance.

In a moment we were amongst the Indians; Alva didn't hesitate a second. He laid about him with his whip at every Indian in sight.

"Get back to your huts, you dirty, low-down savages," he shouted. "How dare you disturb your master's sleep with this noise? *Vamos!*"

Crack, crack, went his whip, with such a satisfactory sound that I had to follow suit when I saw an Indian fitting an arrow to his bow as he ran off ahead of me.

It took only a minute or two to disperse the rival armies. We galloped round about the camp and the paths approaching it until not an Indian was in sight and complete silence returned, with the placid moon riding overhead.

Then Alva lit a cigarette, after offering one to me.

"We'll stay here a little while, sir, to give them time to cool down and go to sleep."

"Then do you think they'll abandon the fight now?" I asked.

"Certain of it, sir. They're only a lot of dirty animals, with minds like children. They've been threatening each other so much that they had to make a show of some kind. Now it is all over and they've fired their arrows and pop-guns into the air they are only too glad of an excuse to end their fight. I've known the brutes for years. Only when they have a twenty-to-one advantage are they really dangerous.

"Ah, here come the soldiers. I'm glad they have had no excuse to use their weapons."

The lieutenant and the sergeant had apparently settled their dispute by finding that there was a horse available for each of them.

We rode to meet them. Alva didn't stop to speak, but rode past them and smiled up at the moon, leaving me to inform them that my foreman's whip had deprived them of the honours of war. And that was the end of hostilities.

The cane harvest is now in full swing. The Indians have apparently quite forgotten their battle, though one can't tell by their hideous expressions and queer clucking language what their temper is.

SUGAR CANE HARVEST

No. 51

San Antonio

A LONG time since I have been able to find time to write you a proper letter.

This cane harvest is a hectic affair. I have been working about eighteen hours every day since it began. Being new to the work, I have perhaps been over-anxious to keep an eye on everything; not that I have done any good, but because I wanted to learn all about it.

Everything is done by piece-work, which is made easy by the fact that every row of sugar-cane is exactly one hundred metres long. The Indians and other workers work in pairs, some cutting down the cane with heavy machetes, the others carrying it to the wide paths between the cane-fields, where they then strip off with their knives the leaves and useless tops of the canes. Each pair of workers is given so many rows for a day's work. When it is completed they receive a certain coloured celluloid disc for each class of work.

Following the cutters and strippers come the loaders. All day, and all night, gangs of men are busy laying a portable light railway track along the grass spaces between the cane-fields. On this track, pulled by mules, run iron trucks on which the cane is loaded. They are then hauled out to the permanent track which runs through the whole length of the plantation, and a quaint little steam engine collects them and hauls them to the sugar mills at headquarters.

As soon as a field is harvested the portable rails are taken up and laid ready for the next field.

The sugar mill is a huge, insatiable monster which must never be allowed to remain for a moment without food for its jaws. Therefore, all the thousands of men and women on the plantations must, by some means, be kept working at top speed. The cane cannot be left long after it is cut, never more than twenty-four hours, as the sugar juice deteriorates rapidly.

Continuous adjustment between numbers of cutters, strippers, loaders and track layers is necessary, so that there shall be no delay. Often we get a bit wrong, then have to put all hands on the work which is in arrears.

The stripping cannot be done at night, as it requires good vision, but the loading and track laying never ceases. Ceaseless supervision is necessary despite the piece-work scheme, otherwise nothing is done properly.

I am out every night for a few hours, never at regular times, with the idea that my appearance on the scene will keep everyone working well. Actually it does, I believe, as these people have a great respect for Englishmen, owing to the magnificent example of the brothers Leach, who are about the finest Englishmen one could hope to meet; always quiet and unhurried, always ready to talk to the humblest of their thousands of employees, considerate of everyone's welfare, tireless in their own supervision of every inch of their estates, and yet never seeming to strive for profit but to run the great industry as if it were a family party in which every worker has an interest. The result is that everyone loves them and that every other Englishman shares in the respect the Leachs so well merit.

I am very lucky to find myself employed by such a company and only hope I shall be able to maintain the high standard which is never demanded here, but which just exists by precept—a sort of tradition.

I play polo on Sunday afternoons, but am a poor performer. Being all day in the saddle might be thought good training for polo. Actually I think it quite the opposite. Anyhow, that is as good an excuse as any other. And I might add that my ponies are far from being as good as they will be when I have my own plantation.

♦

INDIAN HORSE THIEVES

No. 52

San Antonio

HARVEST is finished after months of strenuous toil. All the Indians have gone, thank God!—and everything is now very peaceful.

Cultivation of the new crop is in hand, with about three hundred men. It is an elaborate process, each plant requiring much attention. Artificial irrigation goes on day and night, with considerable difficulty, as water is far from abundant just now.

The despatch of the Indians was a strange business. The argument and squabbling that occurred as they exchanged their pay sheets for merchandise was stupendous: not because they had any complaint about the quantity and quality of their rewards, but because they continually changed their minds.

After having decided on a length of cloth, a couple of blankets, a gun and ammunition, an axe, a knife, etc., etc., the recipient would collect them all in a heap, looking very pleased and proud, then suddenly demand an entirely different selection of everything. Rather like kids at a Christmas-tree.

The man who has charge of this very difficult task has been doing it every year for a very long time and has a marvellous way these with Indians. His patience is inexhaustible and he seems to know exactly what each fellow wants as soon as he looks at him.

The value of the articles given is worked out exactly according to the pay sheets which the men present. It is the choice of articles for creatures who are incapable of deciding what they most want that is so difficult. I'm thankful that it is not my job.

Now here is an amusing story concerning the giving of presents. Amusing for you, but quite the contrary for us except in retrospect.

A number of Indians, the chiefs (*Caciques*) and sub-chiefs, interpreters, and those who have done most work, are always

given a horse as part of their reward, usually an aged mare, which they cross with donkeys in the Chaco, selling the resulting mules at a good profit.

If there are not enough mares, they are given yearling or two-year-old unbroken colts and fillies. Irrespective of rank, any man who has worked a certain number of days (or daily set tasks: some of them do two tasks in a day) is entitled to a horse.

When the great day for distribution came for this plantation—the last on the list—it was found that all the old mares had been disposed of. My lists showed that fifty-odd men were entitled to an animal, therefore the horse and cattle estate tried to bring that number of young animals here to my corrals for distribution.

Now separating unbroken colts from a herd which has been running wild in the hills is no easy matter. To drive fifty of them several miles along unfenced roads is the devil of a job.

It was found that the only thing to do was to bring the entire herd, over a hundred, without attempting to separate them. They would then keep together and be controllable. Once in my corrals each Indian could capture and tie up the animal of his choice and take it away.

All very nice in theory, but it didn't work out quite so well.

The news got about that there were no more old mares, which greatly pleased the younger Indians, who naturally prefer colts. There was a considerable delay in the arrival of the herd. Everyone watched the road excitedly for the cloud of dust which would signal its approach.

Every one of the Indians had armed himself with a strip of rawhide with which to tie his own animal or to help his friends or relatives—or so I thought as I listened to their excited chatter while waiting.

Presently the troop was sighted coming down the road at a gallop, with a dozen cowboys, some ahead and some behind, trying to restrain it. The English manager of the *Finca*, as the cattle estate is called, was in charge.

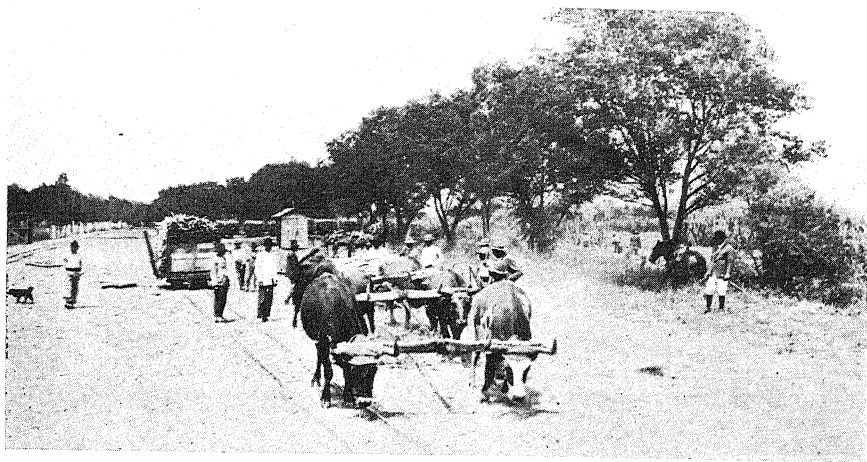
The gates of the corrals were open and all the Indians lined up eager to steer the troop through them, each man with his thong of rawhide ready.



PROVIDENCIA AS I FOUND IT.



PROVIDENCIA A FEW YEARS LATER.



WORK AT PROVIDENCIA.



“WORK” ON THE RIVER BERMEJO.

I sat on my horse watching innocently the grand sight of a hundred wild colts with manes and tails blowing in the wind, eyes blazing and nostrils snorting, as they saw the barrier of Indians ahead of them and checked their speed.

Pandemonium followed so quickly that I couldn't think what was happening.

Instead of steering the animals into the corrals the Indians, obviously by a pre-arranged plan, made a complete ring round the whole herd, and in less time than it takes to write every animal had an Indian on its back.

The screaming of the savages, the angry shouting of the cowboys, the hundred colts and fillies squealing and bucking in every direction and kicking up a cloud of dust which nearly blinded everyone, made a scene which I shall never forget. How those naked savages, without saddle or bridle and with only a noose of rawhide round the animals' neck, could stay on those bucking, rearing, squealing, kicking colts, I just don't know. Of course, they got a good hold on the long manes, but that's a poor help if you have to sit a bucking horse.

However, stay on they did, and lashed the animals with the loose end of the rawhide thong at the same time, so that before the cowboys could loose their *lazos* from their saddles or do anything else to prevent them, every one of those Indians was galloping like fury on a stolen horse towards the forest.

Of course we went after them, but tired working horses, with saddles and bridles and fully dressed and booted riders had no sort of chance of catching up with those almost naked savages on their wild horses. Particularly as they had scattered in all directions leading towards the forest only a couple of miles away.

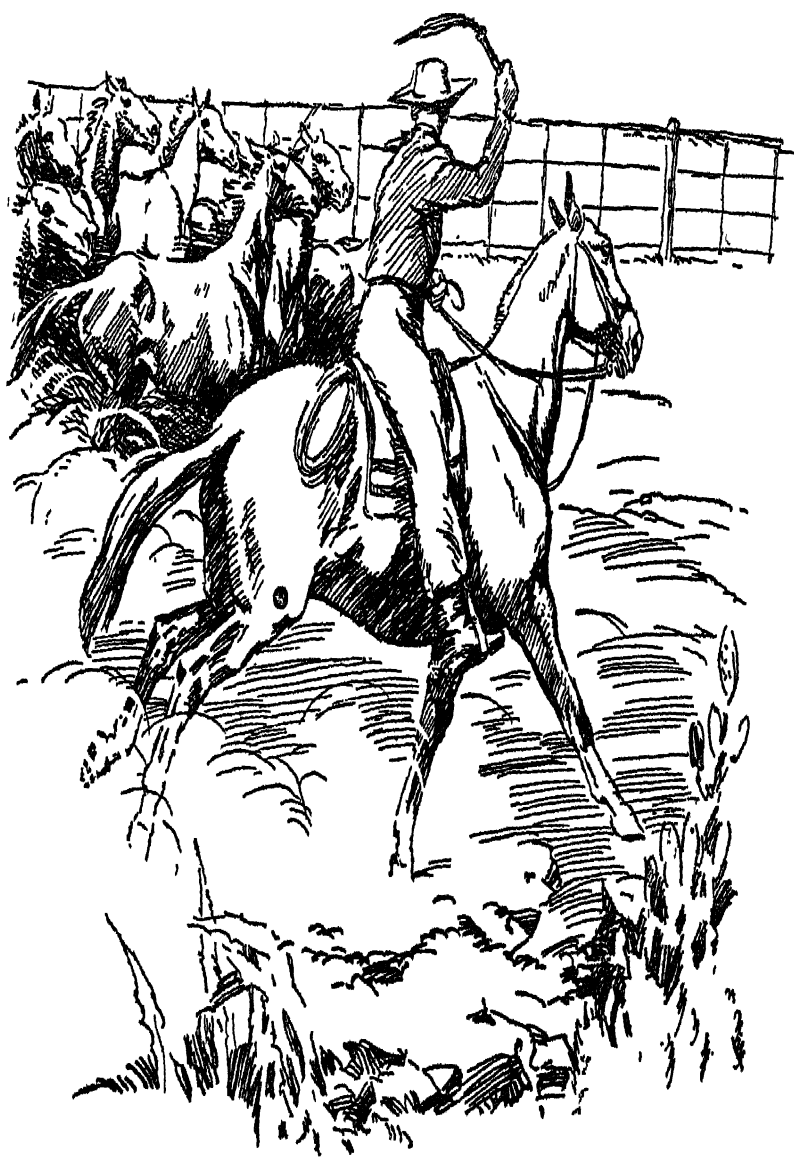
Not one did we recover.

So the matter of distributing horses, always a long and argumentative business, was disposed of very quickly, though at a rather serious increase in cost.

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The permanent manager here—incidentally we are called administrators, which sounds much more important—returns in two weeks' time.

I am to go to La Providencia to take over the administration



PRESENTLY THE TROOP WAS SIGHTED COMING DOWN
THE ROAD

from an old Argentine chap who has been there a great many years. It is the original plantation which existed when the Leachs first came to this valley.

The house is an old Spanish colonial place with adobe walls a yard thick. It is in poor condition now, with no sort of garden, but can be made delightful, and will be very soon.

It is the largest plantation of the estate with 30,000 lines of sugar-cane. The idea is to divide it into two next year.

The heat here is terrific, hotter than I have ever experienced, a hundred and twenty in the shade the last couple of days and almost as bad at night. But with iced drinks and an occasional shower-bath, with beautifully cool water from the well here, I find it endurable.

My address in future will be La Providencia, San Pedro de Jujuy.

ADMINISTRATOR

No. 53

La Providencia

PROVIDENCE indeed seems to have guided me to the end of my travels. Here, in this old house and the surrounding country, is everything that I have sought since I have been old enough to think.

Romance (not the sex variety; that will come later), glorious scenery, interesting work for the nicest employers possible, who put perfection before profit (therefore the latter just happens automatically), a fine old house sufficiently undeveloped to allow me to restore it to my own taste, with a couple of acres of untidy and unfenced land around it which can soon be made into a beautiful garden.

What more could any man want?

When I was down in the barren *pampa* I used to gaze up longingly at the mountains, determined that somewhere in their tumbled ranges lay my ideal home. I had no very definite idea of what that ideal was. I think I pictured a little hut on an eminence where I could sit and dream all day while enjoying the view.

At Miraflores, amidst the forest and the oppression of the too-close mountains, I felt that I had once more allowed my imagination to lead me astray. I felt imprisoned by the very hills I had so longed for and almost wanted to be back in the plains.

Here, thousands of feet up in the Andean ranges, I have both plain and mountain, for this flat and fertile valley is probably a hundred miles long by about twenty miles wide, with the snow-covered mountains surrounding it, not too remote and inaccessible or too close to be oppressive.

But distances are deceptive in this clear air and many wide valleys, perhaps, lie between here and those snowy peaks which look so close that one imagines the wind would blow a cold blast from them. Actually the heat here is terrific just now, but if there wasn't something to contend with I might think I was dead and in Paradise, which wouldn't be a happy thought.

The strange thing is that I have developed a great enthusiasm for work. After being such a failure in my early efforts, this is very surprising. I think I must have been born a manager—no, an administrator, if you please—and am no good at all in a subordinate position. I remember so well everything which distressed me when I was being bossed, that I am able to avoid distressing my employees and assistants in the same way, therefore we get on very well together. Moreover, I have a passion for efficiency and perfection and am able, I feel, to inspire everyone with the same enthusiasm without arousing their resentment by petty displays of authority. Which just shows that a bad employee may sometimes learn to be useful.

The old man who has been in charge of Providencia for so long has now left after being here for a month to "show me round." Actually he never got up before midday, then spent the rest of the day in a chair on the veranda. Every morning at daybreak his horse, an enormously fat animal, would be saddled and tied up in the shade of the big Algarrobo tree beside this house. There it would remain all day and every day. I doubt if the old man had mounted it for years.

On the rare occasions when he left the house, usually to visit some cronies in the near-by town of San Pedro, he always sent for a *coche*.

Yet he contrived to maintain a wonderful knowledge of all the work on the plantation. Two or three times a day the foreman would stand before his chair and explain in detail every bit of work in progress. The old man seemed to have a complete mental picture of each field, each plant and almost every weed. He forgot nothing, and to hear him discuss the work one might imagine that he had just made a thorough inspection of everything.

After dismissing the foreman he would go to the telephone and talk to headquarters about the work in a way which implied that he was incessantly out and about. But they knew all about him and his ways.

He chewed *coca* incessantly and would sit for hours chewing and thinking, without saying a word, like a cow with its cud.

Coca is the leaf of the cocaine plant and is chewed by all the less-enlightened natives here. It is reputed to be very sustaining and soothing, possessing just enough cocaine to be beneficial, I suppose. I have tried it, but found no other effect than I might have had from a mouthful of paper.

There is a white-haired old manservant who has been here for thirty years or more: a lazy old rascal, but very useful, as he knows the character and habits of every man, woman, child and animal about the place, and is so anxious to remain with me that he tells me all sorts of useful things which would take years to discover by any usual means.

Emilio is the old fellow's name. His job is to run my house, wait at table, and valet me. But he employs helpers for everything and has nearly a dozen people working for him, while he shuffles about, superintending and scolding.

I don't object, as I have come to an arrangement by which I give him so much a week for catering and wages—exclusive of drinks—so he can employ as many people as he likes.

If the food is not what I like he will soon hear about it. I give him something extra for all guests, and of those there are likely to be many, the English people here being very sociable and with a habit of dropping in for a meal or a drink at any time, often half a dozen people at once.

My foreman is a great character, one of those little men with

so much personality that one forgets they are not big, imposing people.

Juan Montoya is his name: rather like Napoleon to look at, and with about as much driving power; a tireless worker, who never forgets anything and whose eyes miss no detail of work which needs doing. For years he has been, in effect, in sole charge of the plantation, so rather resents the fact that I am taking a very active interest in everything. He is far too polite to say so, but I sense his attitude.

Apart from thirty-odd thousand rows of sugar-cane, I have two hundred or more acres of pastures and other crops, such as maize, lucerne, pumpkins, etc.

There are forty yoke of oxen, fifty-two horses, sixty mules and ten cows. So I have quite a lot to attend to. Much of the forest adjoining is also part of Providencia. Every year more of it is cleared for new cane-fields, also my men are employed there from time to time cutting fuel for the sugar factory engines, saw-mills, and other industries which the Company owns.

Altogether the most interesting job possible.

I doubt if I shall ever again change my address. If I do, it won't be by my wish.

LOCUSTS

No. 54

La Providencia

PROVIDENCE isn't always beneficent. It sent me a very great trial, in the shape of a swarm of locusts.

It arrived one afternoon like a dense cloud and settled here for the night. A ghastly experience. The young cane, about a foot high, and all the pastures were consumed as if by fire. Not a blade of anything green was left anywhere over half of my land. The adjoining forest, usually verdant throughout the year, is as bare as English woods in January. All through one night I heard the crashing of boughs broken by the weight of the locusts which crowded them.

I hear that the cane will not suffer much harm, as it will grow again, as also the pasture, but for some weeks my animals must go elsewhere to graze. It is a serious loss, of course, but far worse is the fact that the swarm laid its eggs here, and very soon myriads of wingless locusts will hatch out to destroy everything which the swarm left.

I am frantically collecting gear for destroying the creatures: flame-throwing machines, long sheets of tin for deflecting the armies into trenches already dug, poison sprayers, etc., etc. Much of this is lent by the Government, as locusts are a national scourge.

You can't imagine what a big swarm is like. The whole sky for miles and miles is a seething mass of the brutes, so thick that they touch each other. As I wrote to you of the swarms I saw on my way up from the coast, it is rather like looking up into a heavy fall of snow, with big flakes blacking out all the sky, only that locusts are far larger than any snowflakes, bodies two or three inches long, with wings four inches across. Like big brown grasshoppers with wings.

They invaded everywhere. The houses were full of them, in beds, in every jug or other vessel, in every chair, in fact, just everywhere.

One scarce dared speak for fear that one or more of the things might flounder into one's mouth. They got inside my open-necked shirt and wriggled like scaly devils against my skin so that I almost screamed with disgust.

Why, oh why, should God invent such things? Perhaps to test the patience of little people like myself, therefore I won't grumble any more.

Fortunately such a plague very seldom occurs here. This is the only one for ten years. I expect they heard I was here, damn them. But they'll be sorry, for I intend to destroy all their children presently.

One can't destroy their eggs, for they push them into the earth with their tails, so that they can't be seen. I have men watching everywhere for the first sign of the hatching. Then for the slaughter!

DOGS AND LOCUSTS. DAM BUSINESS

No. 55

La Providencia

I'VE bought a puppy, a pure-bred pointer.

He is lemon and white in colour and the most lovable little fellow possible. His parents are well-trained gun-dogs, though there isn't a lot to shoot here. Quail are fairly common, and a few bush turkeys. Anyhow, I didn't buy this dog for shooting, but because I wanted a pal.

Did I tell you that I left Chila at Miraflores? She was never really my dog, having been there before me. She adopted me, with reservations, whilst I was there, but never quite accepted me as her owner. When I left she was busy with a new litter of very mixed puppies, so I left her there. Old Caturelli seemed to have been her best friend and was very glad I didn't take her away.

Now I have a dog who will be really mine. He is already certain that I am the right person for him, or so his tail and tongue seem to say. I call him Camba.

The locusts hatched out over a large part of the plantation. I had a hundred and fifty men on the job of destroying them. They first appear as black crawling things about the size of house flies, and cover the ground so thickly that it looks as if a flood of black treacle were flowing over it.

Using branches, or bundles of twigs like birch brooms, the men were able to steer the seething black mass towards where the way was barred by lengths of tin standing edgewise in the ground, and over which the crawling locusts couldn't climb. Therefore they turned along the barrier towards the trenches prepared, into which they tumbled and were then buried.

Ten men with flame-throwers also did great work on the thicker concentrations of the enemy, but had to confine their action to the roads and paths to avoid scorching the roots of plants.

By the third day of this battle the beastly things had begun

COYA INDIAN FROM
BOLIVIAN ANDES.



COYA WOMAN AND
CACTUS.



CHIRIGUANO INDIANS FROM BOLIVIAN LOWLANDS.



CHIRIGUANOS. MANY WITH TURQUOISE STUDS IN LOWER LIPS.



MATACO INDIAN WOMEN FROM CHACO OUTSIDE THEIR FRONT DOOR.



NOMAD AND NONDESCRIPT INDIANS.



TOBA INDIANS FROM ARGENTINE CHACO.



TOBA INDIAN CHIEFS.

to hop and were much more difficult to deal with, but eventually we destroyed the greater part of them. Only when their wings developed did we abandon the fight.

I should say roughly that we destroyed ten tons of immature locusts. How many hundreds of millions that may be is beyond any sort of computation.

Recently I have been busy at a far more pleasant occupation beside, and in, the river.

I must explain that the fertility of this valley depends on artificial irrigation, without which it would probably be just a cactus desert.

The head of the valley is narrow, where a big river runs between rocky kills. Near there we construct temporary dams across the river to raise the level of the water until it flows into the irrigation canal, and thence to the plantations. From time to time these dams have to be rebuilt, each plantation taking its turn at the work. It has just been my turn and I have been fortunate in having a lot of Chiriguano Indians for the job: a jolly lot of intelligent fellows, who like nothing better than being in the water. They come from somewhere in Bolivia and are very different from the dirty Chaco tribes. Clean in their habits, monogamous, merry, hard-working and loyal, but with the defect that they get very drunk on Saturday nights and fight with their knives very violently.

Now they are camped by the river, several miles from here, under the charge of good foremen, working at the construction of the dam. They cut young trees and lash them together at one end, then erect them in the form of tripods standing on the river bed. The work requires great skill and, as the river is deep, good swimmers are essential. These Chiriguanos are like merry children, and laugh at their work as if it was all a great game.

When the river is traversed by a closely set row of the tripods, branches are cut and lashed transversely against them, then smaller branches as uprights, then more transversely, all lashed together with lianas (the tough stems of climbing forest plants). Finally the whole front of the dam will be covered thickly with



THE DAM

sods of earth rammed into the framework of branches until hardly any water passes through and the level of the river is thereby raised.

It all sounds most primitive and you will wonder why a permanent stone dam isn't built. The answer is that the only place where such a dam would be effective is just where the river passes between the rocky hills—but, alas, that land does not belong to Leach & Company, but to a rival firm, who ask too much for it.

To build a permanent dam lower down in the plain would probably have the effect of making the whole river change its course entirely with the first flood, leaving the dam high and dry. The land here is so flat, and so light for ten or twenty feet down, that as soon as the river encounters any serious obstacle when in flood, it merely makes a new channel for itself somewhere else, perhaps a mile or two away from the obstacle. It might do so much damage by shifting its course that it is very wise to erect no obstacle that the first flood cannot easily demolish, leaving the right of way to the river.

Actually there is a stone dam in what was once the river bed. It is to persuade the river to return to that channel, and the irrigation canal which leads from it, that we have to erect these temporary dams.

A complicated dam business, eh?

A TREACLE BATH

No. 56

La Providencia

MY first harvest is about to start. Despite the locusts, the crop looks very well and I hope the sugar content in the cane is as high as it should be after the care I have taken over cultivation.

It is not always the heaviest crop of cane which yields most sugar. Excessive irrigation may result in a cane full of water, or with too much water in place of sugar.

I have a very mixed lot of Indians here: Tobas from Chaco,

and a tribe of Chiriguanos, with long hair and turquoise ornaments stuck through their lower lips. Also a great many Coya Indians from the high Andes of Bolivia: a queer people who are reputed to be the descendants of the Incas; which I doubt, if the Incas were the fine race that legend says. These Coyas are squat little people, very thrifty and perpetually counting their money, which they keep in bead purses. The men have a mania for black clothes and thick white felt hats. The women wear similar hats and a vast amount of thick clothing. They seem to have half a dozen or more petticoats or skirts, all of hand-woven woollen material, also big shawls of vicuña wool, no matter how hot the weather may be. A most unprepossessing race, but I believe they work well, which is something. The Mataco tribe (thank God, I haven't any here) have been making trouble again, resulting in one of the funniest sights I ever saw.

They are a horrible lot of savages and have one interpreter, who is always a cursed nuisance with his endless complaints. This year, as soon as his tribe arrived, he started to complain about the conditions of work, trying to rouse the whole tribe to join in his protests.

I happened to be at headquarters (Esperanza) when this fellow was making a speech to a crowd of Matacos he had collected there to join in his complaint. I'm thankful I was there, for I wouldn't have missed the sequel for a fortune.

Outside the factory is a wide open space, surrounded by offices and stores, which is the recognized meeting-place for everyone who works on the estates. Usually it is the scene of great gatherings of Indians who come to greet or say farewell to the Leach brothers in the most friendly and affectionate terms.

In one corner of this space is a vast tank to hold the waste products of the sugar mills, a sort of black-green treacle, too impure to be converted into sugar. The tank is, I believe, called an Australian tank, consisting of a circular wall of corrugated iron, five feet high, resting on a bed of concrete probably.

The diameter of the tank is about forty feet. The treacle stuff remains in it, exposed to sun and air, until it ferments, when it is drawn into another factory and converted into alcohol.



THEY WATCHED THIS FELLOW SLOWLY DRAG
HIMSELF OUT OF THAT TANK

The treacle stuff forms a crust on the surface on which collects dust and empty tins, paper, and other rubbish.

Now this Indian agitator fellow was standing beside the tank while haranguing his people, apparently with no effect. Anxious to make himself better heard, he glanced at the top of the tank and saw what looked like an unswept area of solid earth.

In a moment he had gripped the iron edge of the tank and swung himself over. But no terra firma did he find. The crust gave way at once and he sank, face downwards, into a sea of stinking, tarry, decomposed treacle.

I was sitting on my horse watching, for I had been interested to hear the shrill squealing of the agitator. When I saw him subside into the treacle I laughed so loud that all the Indians turned to stare at me. They couldn't see what had happened to their interpreter. He had simply disappeared over an iron wall, therefore they saw no reason for my laughter until I pointed at the tank. They all turned to look and saw a coal-black object trying to climb out. For a moment they didn't realize it was their tribesman, or any other man, for it was merely a mass of tar without form or feature.

Then they suddenly realized what it was. They are dour creatures as a rule, without much sense of fun, but as they watched this fellow slowly drag himself out of that tank with thick black treacle trailing from him like a shroud, they nearly burst themselves with laughing, as I and everyone else did.

The noise brought all the people from the offices and stores to join in the fun.

The victim, scarce able to move for the cloying mess which enveloped him, subsided to the ground and fumbled weakly at his mouth in an effort to clear it, but his clogged hands did nothing to improve matters.

When I left the scene the doctor had taken charge and was making the Indians scrape the treacle off with the backs of their knives. How they eventually got the fellow clean I can't think, but they did.

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I shan't have much time for letters during the next few months, but will send you a note or two occasionally.

POLO. BUCKJUMPER. A BISHOP

No. 57

La Providencia

I AM sending you a photograph of myself on Pickles, my favourite horse. He is turning into quite a good polo pony—better than I am—but has one great fault. He is so keen on the game that he refuses to line up for the ball to be thrown in and insists on galloping about at full speed as soon as he gets on to the ground. If I try to check him he bucks like a bronco until I let him have his head. Not vicious, sideways bucks, but straight ahead, so that, once one is used to it, there is no difficulty in keeping in the saddle.

Lately he has taken to bucking directly I mount, so I wait on the side of the ground until the ball is thrown in, then make my entry in most spectacular style, bucking all across the ground.

I make the most of it and am earning quite a reputation as a horseman, though by false pretences, for Pickle's style of bucking is so methodical and regular that I can adjust myself very easily to it; so easily that, with a polo stick under my arm, I can pull on a glove while bucking on to the ground.

Grand to hear visitors exclaim, "Well ridden, sir," when I know that I am a very ordinary horseman. So I am very fond of Pickles and his tricks.

I have four other saddle horses, two of them old polo ponies but still useful players. Another has been a grand player, but now shies off the ball so much that he is quite impossible, yet every time I pass the polo ground, which adjoins this plantation, he fights hard to go in there for a gallop round even when he sees that there is no game on. Often I save time by giving way to him. Very silly.

The harvest is going well, though, unfortunately, my foreman, Montoya, is drinking far too much and is frequently very thick in his speech. He never neglects his work or forgets anything and is always punctual, but I am naturally apprehensive that one day he will let me down. I feel also that it is partly my fault, as I have made many changes in the methods here, which



LATELY HE HAS TAKEN TO BUCKING

must be very trying to a man who has been practically in sole control for many years.

But it can't be helped, as I know that my methods are right, and have the approval of headquarters, so I must insist on them Montoya or no.

The chaplain of the estates, a very nice little Englishman called Morrey-Jones, is coming to live with me during the hot weather while his wife and children go up to the hills, as almost all the English wives do. He is very broad-minded, fortunately, because every Saturday night six bachelors come here to dine and afterwards we play poker till early on Sunday morning, and drink quantities of beer meanwhile.

Perhaps I shall corrupt the chaplain by getting him to play poker! I hope not.

A few weeks ago the English bishop from Buenos Aires came to the Sala at Esperanza for some confirmations. He put his cloth gaiters with his shoes to be brushed. When he came to put them on he found that the native servant had smothered the gaiters with blacking and had tried to polish them.

One afternoon recently, just when I had lain down for a siesta and was very tired, two men started a knife fight. They were two of my young *mayor-domos* (as we call the gang foremen), and were not drunk, so I knew it was rather a serious matter, particularly as all the women started screaming for me to come and intervene.

I jumped up in a furious temper and ran to the scene, grabbed one man by the neck of his shirt and flung him off, but he was back again immediately to go on with the fight; nothing for it but to use my fists or perhaps see a killing, for it was certainly a desperate affair.

I let out impartially at both men as hard as I could and soon had them both down and so subdued that they forgot their own quarrel. I am no bruiser and hate all fighting, but I have been sleeping badly lately, so this fight in the middle of the day had roused my worst instincts and made me savage.

With sore and bloody knuckles I turned away from the scene through the crowd that had assembled, and was murmuring its applause of my "peace-making," when a young woman,



TWO MEN STARTED A KNIFE FIGHT

daughter of a *mayor-domo*, whom I have looked at with interest very often but never spoken to, ran out and flung herself at me in the most embarrassing way, muttering something affectionate meanwhile.

I felt the damnedest fool in front of all my workpeople, and shook the girl off far more rudely than I really wanted to. I can only imagine that her action was a demonstration of some primordial instinct of admiration for the victor in battle. As I was feeling only regret for having lost control of my temper and was by then rather ashamed, I felt anything but pride in victory, so the lady's attentions were more than unwelcome.

Also, one has to be terribly careful of any sort of entanglement with native girls here, for the Leachs are very moral people and most zealous of the reputation of all Englishmen in their service; rather trying at times, since there is so little chance of meeting any marriageable English girls here. Also, many of these native girls are very lovely to look at, and with the passionate throbbing of guitars playing those wild tango airs almost every night one's thoughts are not always as placid as I suppose they should be.

Angela haunts my dreams too often, yet I dare not disturb her life or my own by trying to revive what must be forgotten. So I never write to her. In fact, I have no idea where she is now.

PERCY. POKER. PADRE

No. 58

La Providencia

THERE was once an Englishman employed at headquarters called—no, I won't tell you his real name, we'll call him Percy—a charming, quiet, almost feminine, little fellow of very good family; so good, in fact, that they wouldn't like the name mentioned in connection with this member of it. He had many accomplishments, a good polo player, very musical, and remarkably good-looking. But he had one terrible failing. Every three months or so, after

being most abstemious, he would indulge in a terrific orgy of drinking, not conviviality with fellows of his class, but a wild mania to swallow as much fiery spirit as he could obtain. The bout would last several days, during which he would haunt the lowest resorts of the natives, not caring where he went, or with whom, or where he slept or anything. A complete and utter abandonment of every vestige of self-respect in his mania for alcohol. A disease of the mind, definitely.

The Leachs did their best to cure him, but failed, and eventually had to send him home to England. That was two or three years ago. Since then no one heard of him until a few weeks ago, when he suddenly appeared, on foot and destitute, at one of Leach's estates twenty miles south of here. The manager of the place, a great friend of mine, had no work to offer him and, knowing that the chaplain is living here with me, kept Percy a couple of days to rest, gave him clothes, then sent him on to me. He knew that it would be hopeless to send him direct to Esperanza, as the Leachs, though the most patient and tolerant of men, do not change their minds.

The chaplain and I couldn't think what to do with the fellow. We couldn't turn him adrift when the Company refused to give him another trial.

He has had the most horrible experiences during the last two or three years, having been to Australia, imprisoned several times for drunken rioting, put in irons on a ship, and all sorts of horrors. His memory is very vague about it all, as, of course he was raving drunk when these things happened.

Just now he is a quiet little gentleman, stricken with the deepest remorse and obviously terrified of the devil which haunts him.

He wouldn't tell us how he found his way here from Buenos Aires. Apparently he has been weeks on the journey, working and begging his way from place to place, towards what his broken mind imagined might be a haven.

For the first fortnight he had the horrors on him; reactions I suppose, after great privations; and tried to get drink. We had to lock him in his room, with the chaplain on guard, giving him a spoonful of whisky occasionally to silence his terrible pleading for a few minutes.

Then the craving left him suddenly. The very sight of the whisky bottle obviously nauseated him and he became an entirely different personality; one of the strangest phenomena I have witnessed.

Then we devised a wonderful plan for his future and are hoping that it will save him.

In Jujuy—the capital of this province—are many very wealthy people whose opportunities for culture have been slight. Many families possess fine pianos which no member is able to play, as there is no one to teach them.

Now Percy is a very good pianist. He speaks Spanish—and many other languages—extremely well, and has the most charming manner. Therefore, what better than to establish him as a music teacher in Jujuy?

The chaplain went there with him, found him rooms, introduced him to a few people, put an advertisement in the paper, and so forth, with the result that Percy already has so many pupils that his income should be quite substantial. The pupils are all young women and, according to Padre, they are all in love with their teacher.

Let us pray that he can keep steady. He has promised to send us a telegram immediately he feels the craving returning, then Padre will dash over to him and “sit on his neck” till he recovers.

We are very apprehensive about it all, but shall be very proud if our efforts succeed. Also we shall be glad to recover what it has cost us.

.

My harvest was very satisfactory and no difficulties occurred. I am thankful to have a little more leisure. Rising at four o'clock each morning, with about eighteen hours work every day, is very tiring. The weather has been terrifically hot for days, a hundred and twenty degrees in the shade! The rains are due at any moment. Thunderstorms roll continuously on the surrounding hills, but seem to avoid the valley.

.

My Saturday night poker party is about to arrive, so I must stop writing and mix the cocktails—in a bedroom jug! I always

give them the same dinner: soup, a brace of beautiful fat ducks, then tinned plum pudding (English make) and blancmange, with a sardine savoury to finish up.

There were nineteen ducks here when I came, which I bought from my predecessor. They spend their time with many other ducks in the stream—irrigation—which runs through the garden, and in the corrals catching the maize which the horses spill. I have eaten two ducks every Saturday night for months past and still have nineteen! I am afraid that Emilio and his satellites mistake other people's ducks for mine when they go out at night to catch them. No one seems to object, so I say nothing.

The blancmange is the *pièce-de-résistance* of my dinner parties. Emilio evidently thinks that, as my guests are all bachelors, separated from white women, we shall be reminded of home by his blancmange.

Using two pudding basins as moulds, he puts two round blancmanges side by side in the same dish, with a bottled red cherry to represent a nipple on top of each. The result is not as realistic as Emilio imagines, but we don't hurt his feelings by saying so.

He is a comic old man, very cunning, but very anxious to please me. He adopts a paternal manner towards me, and seems to think that I couldn't get on without him.

His best effort was one day recently, when we had the annual rodeo—round-up and branding of calves and colts from the hills. It is always the occasion of a big picnic for the English colony. I offered to provide a large hamper of assorted sandwiches, for those who didn't fancy the traditional hunks of beef roasted whole over a log fire.

Anxious to do things nicely, I told Emilio to wrap each two sandwiches in a piece of paper. When the hamper was opened at the picnic we found that the paper the old man had chosen had been torn from a perforated roll of toilet paper!

Here come my guests, and the cocktails are not yet mixed.

.

Sunday morning.—The poker party ended at three a.m., after being interrupted by a crashing thunderstorm and terrific rain. We all went out to enjoy the smell of the thirsty earth in the

first rain for six months, then returned to our game. Padre amused himself by preparing his sermon for to-day, opening bottles of beer, condemning us for gambling, and criticizing the way we played our hands. I fancy he would prefer to be anything but a parson.

Just before three o'clock, showing no inclination to leave us and go to bed, he went out to the veranda to watch the incessant lightning and smell the earth once more.

A moment later he shouted excitedly to us to join him. In the flashes of lightning we saw that the stream had swollen to a big rushing river and that the horses of my guests, tied under the algarrobo tree, were standing in water almost up to their bellies!

Nothing for it but to undress and rescue them, which took only a few minutes.

Then we discovered that the bridge over the stream was washed away, so that my guests could only get home by swimming their horses through the torrent. Wearing their dinner clothes, they weren't anxious to do that or to ride many miles' detour to the next bridge higher up.

They decided to camp out here for the rest of the night. Padre, like a real Christian, insisted on one guest taking his bed, (I tried to imitate him, though feebly) while he went to sleep on the dining-table. The rest lay on the floor or in chairs, as I have only two beds.

At seven o'clock, as usual on Sunday mornings, Montoya appeared on the veranda to talk about the work (there is always a lot to be done, even on Sundays).

Sleepily I went to my bedroom door, which opens on to the veranda, and saw that Montoya was very grave and distressed (also he wasn't quite sober). He carried his hat in his hand and, glancing anxiously towards the door of the dining-room, whispered:

"What has happened, *Patron*? Terrible to think of the nice little English padre to be lying there, when he was so well and happy yesterday. Was he drowned in the flood?"

I felt myself shudder as I heard him.

"Lying where?" I asked sharply. "He was all right when I saw him less than four hours ago."

I had by then walked along the veranda to the dining-room door, through which I saw Padre lying on his back on the table, with his bald head towards the door; around him, stuck into beer bottles, burned six candles. The local Catholic custom is always to light candles round the dead. Close investigation showed that Padre was breathing steadily and smiling happily at the same time.

One of my friends had obviously woken up and played a little joke. As Montoya rode up to the house he had seen the candles through the open door and thought the worst had happened.

He was rather horrified at our levity over a religious rite, when he knew the truth.

PERCY AND PADRE IN TROUBLE

No. 59

La Providencia

PERCY has let us down badly.

"Come at once," said his telegram ten days ago. It was impossible for me to go, so Padre jumped on a horse and galloped the whole forty miles over rough tracks and flooded rivers, but was too late.

A trail of smashed *boliches* (pubs.), black-eyes, and angry little policemen, told that Percy had, by some strange and very pathetic impulse, appealed for our help in the midst of his berserk orgy. The police had tried to arrest him, but, slim and delicately made though he is, Percy had fought them off and escaped. The police thought he was being harboured somewhere in the red lamp district (every town out here has such places), but were not at all anxious to help find him, having apparently had enough of him.

Padre made enquiries everywhere and found that Percy had made well-laid plans. He had obtained advances of payment from most of his pupils, accumulating more than ample funds for his outburst. He had announced that he had to go on a journey, (true enough, alas!), but had also returned to the staid



WALTER LEACH, THE WELL LOVED DON GUALTERIO, FOR HALF A
CENTURY HEAD OF LEACH'S ESTATES IN ARGENTINA, TALKING TO
INDIAN CHIEFS.



INDIAN HUTS OF SUGAR-CANE LEAF.



INDIAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN BEING ENROLLED. AQUEDUCT AND
SUGAR FACTORY BEHIND.

homes of his pupils when he was drunk and asked for more money.

Such is the charm of the fellow that, Padre says, not a pupil or a father or a mother showed anything but deep sympathy for poor Percy and all were willing to forgive him.

Having found no clue to his whereabouts, Padre decided to brave the dangers of the red lamp district. He is a hero, if ever there was one.

I don't think he quite appreciated the humour of what happened. He told me in all solemnity, yet I have a suspicion that he rather enjoyed the adventure.

The red lamp establishments are entirely nocturnal in their habits. It was the hour of siesta when Padre got there and the streets were empty. He speaks very poor Spanish and was naturally embarrassed by the thought of going from one establishment to another asking if they had seen a very intoxicated Englishman, therefore he chose the method of peeping through the iron grilled gates into the open patios beyond, in the hope that he might catch sight of his quarry.

He had not been at that game long, when a door was flung open and a fat "Mother Superior" grabbed him and dragged him inside.

"Ah! You naughty little English priest," she laughed, "want a bit of fun with the girls, eh? But too shy to ring the bell. Quite right, too, for a priest."

Then she raised her voice and yelled :

"Maria, Teresa, Margarita, come quickly, a customer for you!"

The next moment poor Padre was enveloped in the embraces of several love-ladies clad only in their nightdresses.

According to him, his inadequate knowledge of Spanish made escape difficult for "quite a long while."

Eventually he made his intentions clear and found, to his great surprise, that the love-ladies gladly put themselves to much trouble to assist him. By a sort of freemasonry which doubtless exists in their profession, they were soon able to trace Percy.

He was found asleep and badly battered.

Padre took him away in a *coche* to his rooms and stayed with him until he recovered.

Now we have sent him off to Buenos Aires, where the British Consul will find means of deporting him to England once more. His relatives will no doubt give him a poor welcome, but it is their affair.

ALLIGATORS. INDIANS. RATTLE-SNAKES

No. 60

La Providencia

I HAVE had ten days' holiday at another Leach estate, eighty-odd miles north, called Tres Pozos. It is a cattle-breeding estate and not as interesting as I had expected, too much heavy jungle as at Miraflores, with clouds of vicious mosquitoes.

I had been told that one could shoot a jaguar there any day. I spent ten days and nights looking for one, but found no trace.

The only sport I had was shooting alligators, and that was dull. An interesting incident occurred when, after skinning one reptile which had been shot through the head, the man with me asked if I had ever heard of the bag of scent which an alligator has in its inside. I expressed interest, therefore the man dug about inside the animal until he produced a little sac, about the size of a walnut, which contained a very powerful musk scent. As the man held it out to me, the shot, skinned and disembowelled alligator gave a thrash with his tail which knocked the man right off his feet!

I tried to preserve some skins with salt, but in two days they were quite putrid in the hot, damp air and had to be destroyed.

Not much of a holiday, but a change of scene. I was glad to get home.

Strange arrivals here recently were a dozen Hindus or Sikhs, handsome fellows with wonderful curled beards. They have all served in the Indian army. They were sent up this way by the immigration office in Buenos Aires and came to me for work. I was rather interested in them and have employed them. They are intelligent and willing, as well as being British subjects. They say they can bring many more of their race

here if I wish. It may be a good idea, as there is always a shortage of labour.

.

I have two dogs now, having bought Camba's brother, whose owner treated him badly. He is a lively, energetic chap, while Camba is a slow fellow, very affectionate, but not very clever. The new one is called Chireti and is always hunting. When he points it is certain that a quail or other game is there. Camba will point just as rigidly at a caterpillar or a beetle, or anything that crawls, silly old thing.

There are a lot of wild guinea-pigs about here, little mouse-coloured creatures. Camba loves them, not to eat, but to play with. Both dogs follow my horse all day long and twice Camba has carried a guinea-pig home in his very gentle mouth without hurting it at all, and then played with it for hours. Once he brought home a baby quail in the same way. Chireti looks on with disgust at such proceedings.

A terrible thing has happened in the Chaco. Every year we send a caravan with presents for the Indian tribes in order to induce them to come in for the cane harvest. An Englishman, Gifford, goes in charge of the party, consisting of a dozen big mule wagons and lot of men.

Gifford has just returned with only one man. The caravan was attacked by overwhelming numbers of Indians and everyone else killed.

They were camped for the night in long grass when attacked. Gifford happened to have ridden away from it on an exploration at the time and returned to find it destroyed. He was very lucky to escape. The Government talks of sending a punitive expedition, but as these Indians move continuously and have no permanent settlement or villages, it is almost impossible to do anything.

We are all wondering what the consequences will be and if we shall have any Indian labour for next harvest, which should start in a few weeks' time.

.

I have been busy planning new irrigation ditches for land which we are now clearing on the slight slope at the foot of the

hills. An engineer from Esperanza has been here with his theodolite to plot the levels. He had decided upon the highest point to which we could bring the water from the main stream, when Montoya, who has been doing such work by eye all his life, declared that he could bring the water much higher still, taking in a big belt of land. The engineer scoffed and treated Montoya's opinion with contempt. I had to agree with the engineer and his scientific instruments, so ordered Montoya to have the ditch cut on the lower level.

For three days after that Montoya was never quite sober, very sulky, but as hard-working as ever. Then he came to tell me that the new ditch was completed and that the water ran in it correctly.

"Thank you," I replied, "I will have a look at it to-morrow."

He doffed his wide hat as politely as usual, but still with his sulky expression, and mounted his horse to depart. Then he grinned and said:

"But it's where I said, *Patron*, not where that old thing on sticks said."

And off he went.

Sure enough, when I went to look, the water ran through a ditch exactly where he said it would. Flat disobedience to my orders, but, as it has given us two or three hundred acres of irrigable land more than the theodolite said was possible, I should be merely silly to complain. Incredible to think how an experienced eye can be more accurate than precision instruments.

The dogs disturbed a rattle-snake a few days ago. It reared up ready to strike, with its rattle whirring, while the dogs circled round and round at a safe distance, Chireti silent and watchful, Camba barking foolishly. I was terrified that one of them would be bitten and tried to call them off, but without effect.

Suddenly, more swiftly than my eye could follow, Chireti had leapt in and got the rattler by the neck, just behind its wicked head, and killed it.

How a barely full-grown dog could have the instinct and skill so to deal with a dangerous snake, I just don't know.

ANOTHER INDIA

No. 61

La Providencia

MONTHS since you heard from me.

Harvest is once more quite successfully finished. The Chaco Indians arrived as usual and showed no sign that they had any knowledge of the attack on the caravan until one of my *mayor-domos*, whose brother had been killed in that affair, had the enterprise to search the Toba camp here.

Their camps are merely huts made of branches leant together, with cane straw flung over them, and with piles of straw to lie on. From time to time they become so infested with fleas that the Indians burn them and make a new camp elsewhere.

Lieva, the *mayor-domo*, watched his opportunity until all the men were away, then he entered the huts, or shelters, of the three big chiefs. There, under the straw on the floor, he found his brother's Winchester rifle and those of some others of the men killed.

He promptly brought them to me. I notified headquarters and the police (I am a *sub-comisario* of police here, but with little authority) and there was a deuce of a turmoil.

Soldiers and police arrived. The chiefs were arrested. Endless lies were told. All work was stopped for two days, then the chiefs were released again and nothing done. The soldiers and police departed and all was as before.

These Indians are cunning brutes and quite impossible to deal with in any ordinary way. Whether these fellows were actually in the massacre, or whether they bought the rifles from other tribes, as they said, no one will ever know for certain.

We can prove nothing.

The fact that they surrendered the rifles without demur is pretty good proof of their guilt, as they were obviously thankful to escape severe penalties.

.

A great change has overcome this Company recently, altering the entire atmosphere. It is now a Limited Liability Company of over a million pounds capital, with head offices in London. The charming old offices at Esperanza, where saddles and guns and polo sticks shared the space with ledgers, and where the whole twenty-four hours of every man's time was at the service of Leach brothers, have been replaced by an entirely new building. Instead of ancient, sun-drenched adobe, where each man had his own office, with a long veranda outside with the horses tethered there, so that they could look through the window and watch their owners working, there is now a vast brick hall with no partitions, each man at a desk under the eyes of the general manager who sits at the end. Instead of personal chats with the Leachs about the progress of the work, dozens of printed forms must be filled in in triplicate and submitted through devious channels. No doubt all this system will lead to greater efficiency, but many of us naturally regret the change.

. . . .

Some weeks ago we had an official visit from the President of the Republic, with a large entourage of ministers and officials.

The event was enlivened by some amusing incidents, which I must tell you about.

A big parade of all the Indian tribes was arranged on the polo ground. Several thousand of them turned out, the majority in full "war paint," and made a most picturesque scene. They danced and yelled, waved their spears and bows, and beat tom-toms in the wildest excitement, though they hadn't the least idea of the identity of the black-coated gentry in whose honour the parade was staged.

It all went very well. The President and his suite were duly impressed, never before having had an opportunity of seeing those savage citizens of the Republic.

A big luncheon followed at Esperanza, where some of my Sikhs (I now have fifty of them here) were very useful as waiters. Their head man came to me a few days before the event to say that he had heard of it, and as a dozen of his fellows had been

mess-waiters to their regiments in India, might they be of assistance at the banquet?

Walter Leach was very pleased with the idea, as good waiters for a hundred important guests had created a serious problem.

The matter of attire then arose. The Sikhs, in their work-stained calico shirts and drawers, with dirty turbans round their heads, looked anything but savoury.

Naran Singh, the leader, smiled confidently when I mentioned the matter.

"You leave that to me, Sahib," he said, bowing ceremoniously, "we will do great honour to the President Sahib and his friends, who are the guests of the Leach Sahibs, who are our dear masters."

There was such hauteur in the old fellow's manner, such dignity in his curly whiskers, that I couldn't doubt him, so I left him to fulfil his word. But I was not a bit prepared for the magnificent spectacle which appeared on the morning of the banquet.

I was in my office when I heard marching feet on the veranda outside, then sharp words of command in English.

"Halt. Left turn. Right dress," in the best sergeant-major style.

I pinched myself to be certain that I was awake before going out to look.

There I nearly fell down with surprise.

Twelve tall Sikhs, not differing by half an inch in stature, stood like statues before me: each man dressed in the whitest of white garments, long shirts outside baggy trousers tied in at the ankles, with a cummerbund of sky-blue silk round each lean waist, and on each head a snowy turban wound faultlessly with a length of sky-blue silk entwined in its folds. Each jet-black beard (except for Naran Singh's, which is greying) had been oiled and curled until not a hair was out of place.

In this country, where dust a foot deep alternates with deeper mud in the rains, and where everyone soon assumes the prevailing hue, the sight of those immaculate white statues gave me a queer thrill, particularly when I remembered that they were British subjects from far-away India.

How Naran Singh knew that sky-blue and white were the

colours of the Argentine flag I couldn't think. I was only vaguely aware of it myself.

It was a charming gesture which these strangers were offering to the President, without any suggestion of reward.

I looked at Naran Singh's handsome old face as he stood rigidly at the flank of his men, staring unblinkingly at the wall before him while awaiting my orders, and felt deep gratitude. I also felt considerable awkwardness, for it was obvious that they would stay where they were for ever unless I gave an order.

My brief acquaintance with the Army did not help me to find the right command for such a situation, yet I felt certain that such was expected of me.

"Party, stand at ease," I at last essayed, then, "Stand easy."

I was very doubtful, but it worked very well. The twelve dusky faces relaxed into happy smiles as they saw the pleasure with which I thanked Naran Singh and all of them for their excellent parade.

I then had to find conveyances to take them to Esperanza, as I daren't risk spoiling their perfection by allowing them to march along the dusty road for two miles.

The Leachs and everyone at Esperanza were just as astonished and pleased as I was when the party arrived there.

They waited perfectly, though, as they had previously warned me, their religion forbade them from handling any plate containing beef.

The great joke of the whole affair was when the President, sitting in the seat of honour and having just come from inspecting many tribes of strange Indians, turned to Walter Leach beside him and asked:

"And what part of the Republic do those magnificent fellows come from?"

Don Gualterio (Spanish for Walter) had some difficulty in explaining the matter without stressing the ignorance of his most important guest.

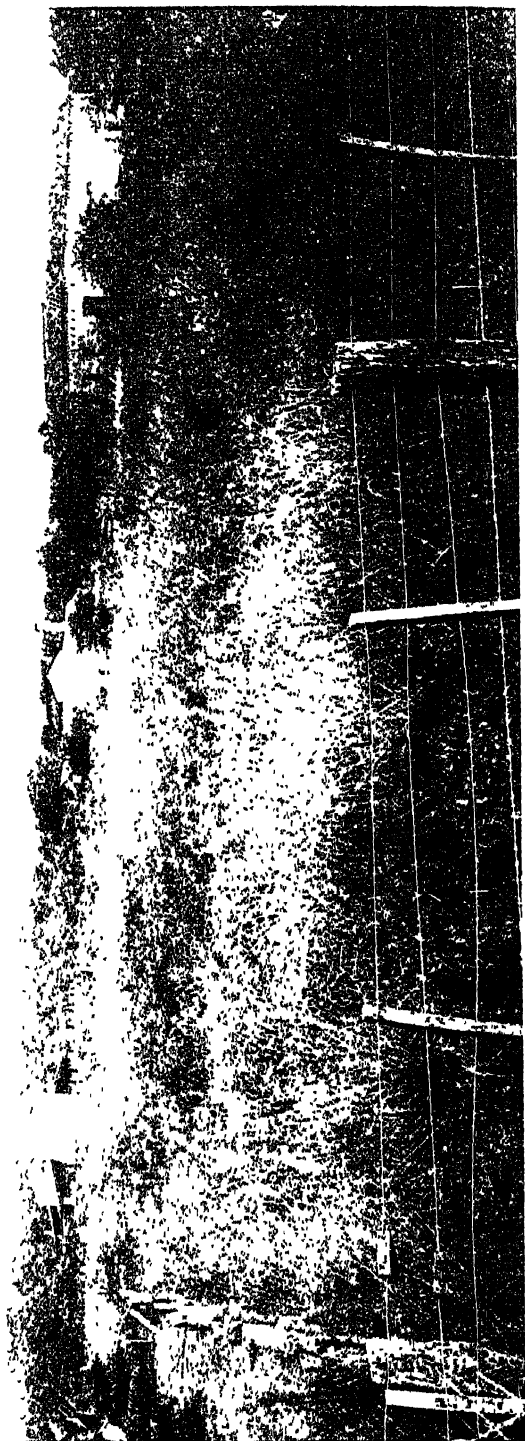
.

But the Sikhs got me into serious trouble with the President a few days later.



THE AUTHOR'S BROTHER, DON JORGE MUIR, WHO SUCCEEDED HIM
AT PROVIDENCIA AND LIVED THERE FOR TWENTY YEARS.

This picture shows a good type of North Argentine native pony.



A SHOPPING CENTRE AT ESPERANZA IN JUJUY.



POLO TEAM AT ESPERANZA.

L. LEACH.

C. H. B. MACDONALD

A. ALEXANDER.

J. REVOUX.



THE END OF THE STORY.

Back to the Army again. Anglo-Argentine volunteers en route. Author on extreme left.

Their camp is away at the far end of the plantation, beside the railway line. One morning, a few days after the Presidential party had continued their journey to the northern frontier, Naran Singh reported that one of his men had been killed by a rattle-snake and could they bury him according to their own religious rites? I offered my sympathy and unhesitatingly gave my consent to any sort of burial. Such things don't worry me at all, so I forgot the matter.

Late the same afternoon, I saw the special train of the President pass slowly down the line, as all the trains do on this funny little metre gauge.

Twenty minutes later I reached the house to find the clerks and Emilio very excited, saying that the President's secretary was on the telephone and that there was serious trouble awaiting me.

I went to the telephone, to be told the astounding news that some of my Indians from India were burning alive one of their people and were dancing round the fire; that the President had witnessed the horrible scene from his train, and was awaiting my immediate explanation of such an atrocity!

I thought someone had gone mad. I couldn't think that the matter was serious, but promised to gallop immediately to the spot indicated to investigate, and would send my report to the President's secretary by telegram to Jujuy as ordered.

I then rang off and jumped on my horse.

Then I laughed and jumped off again, for I had suddenly remembered that Sikhs—or many Indian races, anyhow—always cremate their dead, and that the President had chanced to witness the funeral that Naran Singh had asked permission for the same morning.

I grabbed the telephone and was glad to find that the special train was still at the station. After a little delay and some lengthy explanations to secretaries and people, the President himself came to the telephone.

Evidently he was still conscious of the ignorance he had displayed about the Indians from India at the banquet, for, in stern tones, he told me that no such barbarous customs would be permitted in his civilized country, that if it was necessary to import barbarians from India to carry out our work, then the

least we could do was to compel them to conform to the laws of decency as practised in the Great Republic of Argentina.

"Si, Señor Presidente," I replied with all due humility, "I am extremely sorry that Your Excellency should have been so annoyed, etc., etc."

Then we rang off.

I did not tell him that the Matacos, when they burn their flea-ridden camps, often leave a sick or aged Indian to be consumed by the flames!

GEORGE AND A COW. ANOTHER MURDER

No. 62

La Providencia

GEORGE was staying here with me recently. I persuaded him to get up with me one morning to see the men despatched to work. He has never been accustomed to rising two hours before daybreak and wasn't very pleased, but, as he expects to get a plantation soon, he agreed it would be as well to see how the work is done.

When the men had all been sent off I had a few minutes' work to do in the office, so asked George to put the bridles on our horses, already saddled and eating their corn in the little corral by the house.

Presently I went to join him. In the pitch darkness I heard him cursing furiously and found that for five minutes he had struggled to put a bit into a horse's mouth, then, when he went to put the bridle over its head, found that it was one of my milk cows!

.

There has been a sad tragedy on one of the estates farther north. An Englishman went out into some desert country by himself to look for strayed cattle. His horse returned without him, so the next day a search party, including Padre, went out to look for him.

For several days they searched through long grass, saddle

high, without finding any trace, until at last, guided by a flock of vultures, they found his body, or what was left of it.

Beside it was a note, written in his own blood with a bit of stick, to say that he had been thrown from his horse and broken his leg.

.

Camba and Chireti have been engaged in police work very cleverly.

One night, when I was trying on a pair of new breeches, just arrived from Bond Street, a great turmoil of shouting and screaming broke out amongst the men's hutments. A *mayordomo* ran in to tell me that a Chiriguano Indian had decapitated another with a machete and that the murderer had run into a cane-field, where he was being surrounded.

The cane is now full grown, about eight or nine feet high, and so thick that it would be impossible to find anyone hidden in it.

I went out, in my new breeches, with Camba and Chireti following me, saw the body, then went to the cane-field, a piece about four acres, and found it completely surrounded by men, but with no one anxious to enter the tangled cane to find a murderer, armed as he was with a great machete.

I didn't feel at all like setting an example, and was hesitating whether I should be justified in setting fire to the cane, when I saw the dogs dash into it excitedly, Chireti leading as usual.

A moment later I heard Camba barking furiously and then Chireti growling. By some inexplicable means they had divined that we were hunting a man and had joined in. There was little doubt they had found him and, by the barking and growling, were moving him through the cane. I wasn't a bit scared that the man would get them with his machete, having watched them avoid an angry rattle-snake.

I was hoping they would be able to drive him out when I jumped at the sound of a revolver shot amongst the cane. The voices of the dogs told that neither of them had been hit and that they were still driving the murderer before them.

It is very rare for a Chiriguano Indian to possess a revolver. This fellow was obviously a really dangerous character.

A moment later there was a shout at the end of the cane-field and two more revolver shots. In the faint moonlight the man had dashed out, firing at and missing those who tried to stop him. He had then plunged into a swampy thicket on the other side of the road, where the irrigation stream had formed a small pond surrounded by half an acre of tall reeds and tangled undergrowth.

The dogs had followed close, but were immediately at fault. Scent had obviously been lost as the fellow plunged into the water. For ten minutes we searched the thicket as well as was possible for its entangling weeds, which were too green and wet to burn. Then suddenly I noticed Chireti at point—quivering from tip of nose to end of his rigid tail—at a spot where the water was deepest.

A lamp was brought and there, with only his nose and eyes out of water, lay the murderer. We should never have found him amongst the reeds without Chireti's guidance.

It didn't take long to drag the fellow out of the water, tie him up, and hand him over to the police when they presently arrived.

Alas, that swamp was bounded by a rusty wire fence. As I climbed through it my new breeches caught a jagged end, which tore a triangle almost beyond repair!

THE SUMMIT OF THE MOUNTAINS

No. 63

La Providencia

I HAVE been up against a big problem lately. I am due for six months' leave after three years with this company and naturally want to go home. But I am afraid that if I leave here I shall feel the old longing to wander again and may never return. Moreover, I should spend all the money I have saved. So I decided not to take the long leave, but to go for a short holiday to the high mountains, and to keep my eyes open for a likely bit of land to buy, with the idea of starting business on my own account in a few years' time.

I contemplated a trip with mules to the mountains, but found it would take too long and be too costly. You see, I am getting canny about money at last! Also, the man who was going with me fell ill and I am full of malaria myself and not in any condition for weeks of rough travel through forests.

I decided to go by train to the northern terminus of this funny little metre gauge railway which runs to the frontier of Bolivia high up above the timber line. The railway was built for military purposes during some argument between the two Republics. A train goes north one day and returns the next, winding its way through the mountains and sometimes climbing on a ratchet and pinion arrangement where the incline is very steep.

I was disappointed with the scenery, as, instead of rugged rocks, waterfalls, pine trees, rich valleys and so forth, there is nothing but vast heaps of a crumbly-looking shale stuff, very barren and ugly, with only hideous cactus and prickly pear for vegetation.

The shale, or slate, of which these mighty mountains seem to be composed, must be infinitely more durable than it looks. Seen from a distance, the extremely rugged formation had led me to expect nothing but huge rocks. Why this stuff hasn't all washed away before now I don't know.

La Quiaca is the terminus and a more barren, desolate spot is impossible: a collection of twenty little houses scattered anyhow around the station, one of them calling itself a hotel.

For miles and miles in every direction runs the great table-land of rounded hills without the smallest sign of vegetation anywhere; not a tree, or a bush, or a blade of grass; nothing but a smooth surface of what seems to be tiny fragments of slate, so firm and even that a motor-car could be driven in any and every direction quite regardless of roads, but no motor-car has yet been seen there.

But the air is just marvellous—after one has got over the vertigo of the first couple of days at such an altitude. The snow-capped peaks are right alongside, separated by a deep valley from the barren table-land, and for some strange reason the snow was thick on slopes far below La Quiaca, yet the

barren plateau was quite devoid of snow when I was there and had had none for several months.

The frontier is a fair-sized river winding down from the north between banks absolutely bare of vegetation, giving the impression that the water is poison instead of life-giving moisture.

The station is two or three miles from the frontier, and as no road is necessary on such smooth, hard soil, and the river fordable anywhere, the numerous caravans of pack llamas between the station and the village on the Bolivian side wander promiscuously in all directions, thereby giving the revenue people who guard the frontier a great deal of trouble. So much trouble indeed that all of them carry a bottle of gin in their pockets with which to console themselves.

There is supposed to be a rigid customs barrier between the two countries, but no self-respecting customs officer would stay in such a place for more than a day or two, therefore those who take the job are horrible scallywags and were never sober when I saw them. They gallop drunkenly up and down the river banks pretending to intercept the Coya Indians with their laden llamas, but obviously making no effort to examine the loads.

I crossed into the Bolivian village several times during the week I was there, but found it very sordid, poor and uninteresting. In fact, but for the marvellous air, which I could feel driving the malaria out of me every minute, I should have been very miserable, particularly as I was incessantly very hungry, with nothing but tinned food to eat in the dirty little inn.

By the end of the week I was so invigorated that I wanted to run all day, but found that even fast walking made me completely breathless on account of the rarefied atmosphere. A queer sensation to feel a terrific urge of energy and to be incapable of anything but the most leisurely movements.

Alas, the impression of well-being was entirely illusory, for as soon as I returned to lower altitudes amongst trees I felt very limp again.

I spent two days on the return journey at a place called Calilegua, where the Leachs have another cane plantation and a big fruit estate. A charming old man called Robert Smythe manages it. He has been there many years and is so crippled with malarial rheumatism that he has to be lifted in and out of

his saddle, but is comparatively comfortable when in it. He loves the estate and has done wonderful things in the way of producing new varieties of oranges, bananas, and other sub-tropical fruits. Also he has started a coffee plantation, which is doing well, and has imported English trout into one of the mountain streams and is very proud of them.

After dinner, on the first evening there, I was surprised when Smythe and the Englishmen who work with him told me not to stub out my cigarette-end, but to bring it out to the veranda. There we threw down our glowing "fag-ends," when, with a queer grunt, an enormous frog hopped from a corner and, with a flick of his tongue, swallowed them all in quick succession and very evidently enjoyed his red-hot meal.

Calilegua is much more tropical than here, with a far heavier rainfall. It seems that wherever large areas of forest are cleared the rainfall diminishes immediately. At Calilegua the plantations are not in one large cleared area, as here, but are interspersed with belts of trees. Some day perhaps it will be found advantageous to re-plant the trees on a lot of this land, possibly fruit trees.

When I buy an estate—and I have my eye on one—I shall be very cautious before I change the whole character of the landscape by clearing off every indigenous tree to make room for crops. Nature obviously resents too violent disturbance of her handiwork.

Some day, when I am a wealthy landowner, you must come and visit me and I'll show you what a plantation really should be. . . .

THE END

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